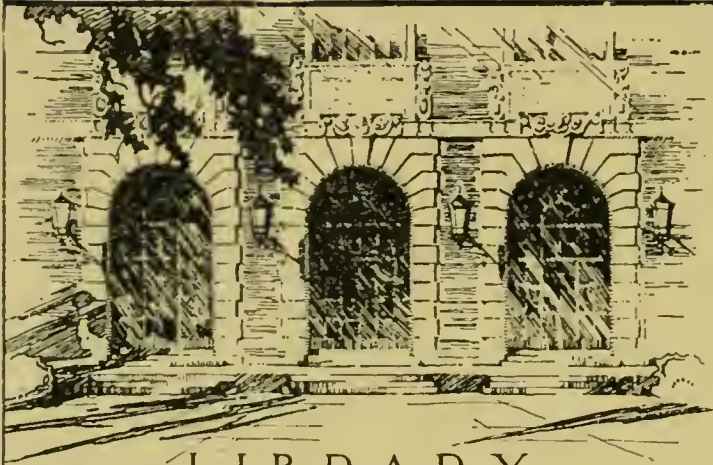






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THE
MASTER OF RIVERSWOOD.

A Novel.

BY
MRS. ARTHUR LEWIS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



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THE MASTER OF RIVERSWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

ONE wild, wet evening, at the end of May, 185—, a closed carriage, with a pair of impatient, steaming greys, drew up at the lodge-gates of a great park, and the old lodge-keeper came out to open them with a horse-cloth over his shoulders, and a singularly grave and anxious visage. This he directed, as well as the driving rain would let him, towards the two men in white waterproof coats who sat on the box seat.

“Come all right, eh?” he inquired.

“Yes; all right,” answered the coachman. “Just give me the whip-end out of this near ’orse’s ’arness, will you? It’s so

awful wet for William to get down. It's got into a confounded knot somehow."

While the old man directed the attention of his not too nimble or expeditious fingers to the "confounded knot" in question, he asked again,

"Seemed much upset, did he?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," returned the coachman; "didn't look or speak partickler lively, I noticed that. Thanks, old fellar, that'll do. Good night to you." And as he spoke, the horses started onward over the wide gravel drive, soft with two days' soaking rain; while the trees of the park on either side swung their dripping branches, and seemed almost articulate in their strange moaning.

"Poor lad," said the lodge-keeper, going into his house, after he had closed the gates, and slowly disencumbering himself of his hat and horse-cloth. "I wonder now, whether he'll be most glad to come into the property, or most sorry for th' old master's death—eh, Mary?"

"Mr. Rochefort?" exclaimed his wife,

turning round from the fire, where she was busy with a saucepan, and showing a very red, but rather youthful and comely face, “What do you mean by talking to me i’ that way? If you can say nothing better than that, with his father’s corpse lying on the very bed where I first laid him down, a blessed baby, by his mother’s ——”

Here Mrs. Rudge’s feelings and manifold recollections became too much for her, and dropping the spoon with which she had been stirring, as if it burnt her, she sat down on the nearest chair and covered her face with her hands.

“Come, come, old girl, don’t fret,” said her husband, kindly; “it’s no flesh and blood of ours that’s gone, and Mr. Rochefort’ll get over it as all young fellars do, though I dare say he’ll feel it a sort of thump at first. Don’t think no more of any of ’em, but get on with my supper.”

“It’s easy to say think no more of them,” returned his wife, drying a few tears, and addressing herself again to her beef and onions; “but you hav’n’t nursed him at

your breast, as I have, and done pretty nigh everything for him, till he could run about."

"No, I ha'n't," replied old Stephen, demurely; "that's certain."

"Be quiet, will you?" was his wife's somewhat sharp rejoinder, as she looked up, and half lifted her wooden spoon.

"Why, bless the girl, what have I said now?" inquired her husband, affecting an astonished stare, by way of helping to revive her spirits.

Possibly it did revive them; at any rate Mary laughed; and then, after lifting the saucepan from the fire, and again applying her apron to her eyes, she passed her husband to get the white cloth, and as she laid it, hummed a tune. And so, in a different mood, they sat down to supper. The fire burned cheerily; the fringed red curtains of the latticed windows, and the flowers in gay pots on the sills, screened them from too wide a view of the beating storm and leaden sky without; the canary sang on its perch, and the buxom little wife helped the re-

dolent brown onions, and appetizing beef and gravy of her stew, and poured out for her lord his pewter mug of Riverswood-brewed beer.

So it is in life ; the living eat and drink, talk and laugh (though perhaps with a sigh, and a few tears between), while the dead—whom they have just seen die—lie in awful, chilly state, unseeking and unsought, every sense annihilated, every pulse for ever still.—Do they *know* how we forget them ?

The carriage, in which sat the new master of Riverswood, continued its rapid course through more than a quarter of a mile of magnificent park-land, and stopped before a large, old-fashioned mansion, very much over-grown with ivy and other creepers. It had been much added to at various times, but always in admirable taste, so that it was difficult to tell at the first glance what had been the extent of the ancient habitation. It was of great size now, and looked a grand place enough. In front there lay broad, smooth lawns, now soaked with rain, and of a delicious emerald green, exquisitely laid out flower-

beds, stone vases containing creepers and moss, artistically disposed groups of thick evergreen, and dark branching, solemn fir, and past all this, the broad drive swept in a fine curve to the front entrance.

The occupant of the carriage observed none of these things. He remained seated, and leaning back against the cushions—pale and pre-occupied, till the moment when the horses drew up before the house. Then, without waiting for the carriage-door to be opened, he let himself out, and a moment after had crossed the threshold of his home—that threshold on which he had last stepped with such different feelings: *then* a boy, with his last term at Oxford before him, *now* a man, facing Death—and Life.

The housekeeper and the butler both met the master in the hall.

“Where is my mother?” was his first question, brought out of white, dry lips, and a dry throat. He had scarcely made the words audible.

“The doctor has ordered Mrs. Longley

a composing draught, sir," answered the housekeeper, who looked very much overstrained, and as if she had been crying; "and she is sleeping just at present. But I don't think she will sleep long, sir."

"Don't let her be disturbed. But come in here for five minutes, Mortimer, I want to speak to you."

The butler followed him into the dining-room, where the lamps were lighted, and the dinner-table already set out. The silver épergne of flowers and moss stood in its centre-place as usual; the dessert-dishes of old, frail, richly-coloured china were grouped around it, and decorated with delicate leaves. Ready for the master's using lay the great buck-handled, silver-mounted carving-knife and fork, which had been taken for so many years, at the same hour, by the hands that now lay stiff and cold. Everything was the same, but with such a terrible difference.

Rochefort sat down, feeling suddenly sick and faint.

"I laid places for two, sir," said the

butler, fidgeting nervously about some of the knives and forks, which were already laid with absolute exactitude, "though I'm afraid missis won't be downstairs. But I thought it would look a little more *home-like* to put covers for two."

"Mortimer," said Rochefort at last, with an effort, "don't—put me to sit in his place, yet—not to-night."

The echo of his own words went like a stab of sharp pain to his heart. Rising suddenly, he walked once or twice the length of the room, struggling to keep down the awful swelling in his heart and throat, and the sob that seemed to rise again and again, as if it would choke him. The butler, who had grown almost grey-headed in the Riverswood service, with a suddenly-coloured face, proceeded to remove the master's knife, fork, glass, &c., and then, by dint of some invention, made work for himself in the room until Rochefort spoke again.

When he did so—and he had to wait till he could trust his voice—it was to ask for

full details of the accident. Rochefort had not known till he reached Gowerford an hour and a half before, that his father was dead. By the thoughtfulness of the house-keeper a note had been written, and placed inside the carriage for him, that he might not receive his blow at the station, and in the presence of witnesses. The men had been instructed to tell him nothing. But the master had asked them nothing. He had believed ever since the morning that he should see his father no more; and he read the few lines that assured him of that as he was driven towards home.

"I will go upstairs now," he said, when he had heard all; "you—can tell me where." He rose from his chair as he spoke.

"To your own room, sir?" asked the butler.

"No—no; not yet. I must see——"
He could not finish.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I wasn't sure if I rightly understood you. In his own room, sir. Missis is in the red room."

They went upstairs. Mortimer turned the lock of a door at the right hand of a long, wide, crimson-carpeted corridor, decorated with many pictures, and with marble statues and groups in niches; opened it, let his master pass in, and then, after following him and lingering a few seconds by the side of the bed, went out, and left him alone.

Rochefort had never yet in his life looked on death. At first he was awed and overcome as he had never thought it possible for him to be, by that awful and solemn stillness, to describe which every language on earth still wants, and will for ever want, words. For is sleep *ever* like death? Never, unless it be for the first few moments after the spirit has fled; while the hand yet lies as the last weary movement threw it; while the lips and brow are yet warm; and while, possibly, the half smile of blessed relief from pain still lingers over the face. After this, it is no longer sleep, but *death*; death—actual, hopeless, positive: majestic, elevating, divine!—the strangest, the most awful,

the most sorrowful thing, in God's great universe.

Not slowly, but with one overwhelming, overpowering shock, the son realized, as he stood by his father's motionless form, that the eyes which had met his in kindness for twenty-two years were shut to earth's light for ever ; that the voice which had scarcely ever uttered an undeserved word of reproof, and had uttered many words of unforgotten counsel and warning, would never utter counsel or warning again. The sense of his loss—of his orphanhood, of his sudden, complete, and unmeasurable *distance* from the father to whom he had been present ever since he was born—who had to a great degree guided his life, and who had now gone from him without there being the possibility of an adieu, or of one expressed wish, or hope, or faith, on either side—came over him with a force for which he was utterly unprepared.

Rocheport's nature was strong, and he was little given to displays of passionate feeling ; but now, not many moments after

he had been left alone with that passionless presence, he flung himself on his knees by the side of the solemn bed, which was like a grave, and burst into an agony of weeping.

When the paroxysm was over, and he rose from it, he felt as if he had passed through a valley of deep shadows, of which life hitherto had afforded him no momentary glimpse ; but he rose, also, into something like grey light, on the other side. And with the dim perception of this light, and the sense of a certain power within and above him, which even now, in the "halt" to which he had been brought, strung his nerves, his will, his heart, he went out of that chamber of death, and greeted his life with its first grim and sorrowful duties face to face.

He had lost much in his father ; but he had lost nothing that was irreparable. His life was whole, without the life that was gone. The words sound cold, and they are certainly sad ; but they could be uttered truly enough in many cases like his.

Mr. Longley had been a reserved, a proud,

but always an honourable man; he had been rather a stern, but always a just father: he rarely used terms of affection to his son, but his hopes were strongly bound up in him. He left him the great gift of an unsullied name, and he had transmitted to him a nature free from those tendencies which sully any name—the greatest as the lowest.

There were qualities, however, in the son which the father had been entirely without—qualities which prevented their ever becoming close friends. The elder man had perhaps understood the younger better than either of them would have acknowledged to be the case: perhaps, also, he had liked, though he would not encourage, and could not sympathise with, Rochefort's tendency to what he called "idealism" and "enthusiasm." Mr. Longley could always hold his place in society with unruffled dignity, suavity, and propriety, even if with a certain stiffness: Rochefort was too often, at this time, brusque, impetuous—a little irritable, and perhaps a little hypercritical.

“You will enjoy life, possibly, more than I have ever done, Rochefort,” his father had once said to him; “but you will suffer in it far more.”

“I have no doubt I shall,” had been his son’s rejoinder, as he stooped to unfasten a collar from his dog’s neck; “but we’ll breast the waves, when they come, won’t we, Nigel, old boy?—not fall before them.”

And then whistling, and with his dog leaping before him, he went off for his ride. He looked forward to life as he looked forward to a bathe in the breakers off Tenby or Douglas, or a plunge into the Channel from the stern of a pleasure yacht. A slight tendency to moodiness or melancholy in a young man who has never known one real sorrow, does not make him less happy. Rochefort took life seriously for two-and-twenty; but he had very keen enjoyments in it.

Mr. Longley had not been in a good state of health for more than a year before he died; but his death was owing to an accident. He had a horse to which he had

taken an unaccountable fancy ; perhaps it was chiefly because he had chosen it in opposition to the advice of both his head groom and his son. She was a beautiful creature, with perfect paces, and thoroughly aristocratic action in every point ; but her faults were bad ones.

“I wish you wouldn’t ride Diana,” Rochefort had said to him, just before he left home after the Christmas vacation. “I don’t like her. She’s not the horse for you.”

“Nonsense,” returned his father, as he poured out his second glass of sherry ; “you want to make me nervous. And there’s your mother wants me to give up riding altogether. Riding does me good, and I’m going on with it. I don’t believe it’s anything but my digestion that’s wrong, and what’s to set that right, if it isn’t riding ?”

“I don’t want you to give up riding,” returned his son, “but I wish you would change your horse.”

“Why, what’s the matter with her ?” asked the father, with some irritation. “Do

you all think I'm growing decrepid, and can't manage my reins?"

Mr. Longley was a very bold and experienced rider, and had never had it hinted to him in his life before that an animal was too much for him.

"I don't think you ought to ride a horse which has to be jammed up against a wall by two men before she will let you mount," persisted Rochefort, as he cracked his nuts.

"Pooh! that's only her way. She goes like an easy chair when you're once on her, and off."

"Yes—when she doesn't try to throw you before you're out of the court-yard. Do you like my horse?" inquired Rochefort, looking up, as an idea suggested itself to him.

"Trafford? Well, yes, I've no objection to him. But he's rather a hard mouth. Di's mouth is exactly what suits me."

"But I don't like her eye, father; and I'm certain she's a temper. Will you let me have her, and take Trafford instead?"

"No, I won't, Rochefort, and then let

you sell her for anything you think she's worth. I shall keep her as long as I like her; and now don't teaze me any more. Have any more sherry? No?—then, let us join your mother."

This was in January; and one day in May—the day on which our story begins—Diana threw her master, and dragged him in the stirrup till he was insensible. It had been raining all the day before, and she had not been exercised. Mr. Longley had become fanciful and nervous about himself since his health broke, and believed that a single day in the house did him harm. In the early morning it was fair, and though there were heavy clouds in the sky, which slowly gathered in weight and width, he sent orders for his horse to be got ready, and for the groom to take her a run in the park first. The groom did so, and then the master mounted her in the court-yard, and set off on his ride. She took fright, after going two or three miles, at an old man with a black bundle sitting on a heap of

stones by the road-side, and set off galloping. It was supposed that she gallopped until her rider became giddy, and could no longer keep his seat. At any rate, she was finally stopped by a toll-bar man; and Mr. Longley's head was held up on his wife's knee, as he lay on the stone floor of her little kitchen (to which the two together had contrived to lift, or rather drag him), while the man ran for assistance. A messenger was despatched on the horse to Riverswood, and from Riverswood they sent a closed carriage, with the housekeeper and two men.

The groom who rode to Gowerford for the doctors, was instructed to telegraph to Mr. Rochefort. Mrs. Longley was in strong hysterics in the drawing-room, and could give no orders, but the housekeeper wrote with a shaking hand the message that was to be forwarded.

“From Ellen Robinson, housekeeper, Riverswood Hall, ——shire, to Mr. A. R. Longley, Magdalen College, Oxford. The master has had an accident, and been

thrown from his horse, and dragged. Please come home at once."

Rochefort received the telegram as he sat at a late breakfast, with two or three other men. The whole party were laughing and talking loud, and their host was amusing himself and one of his friends to perfection, by trying to make his terrier (who would do a great many things, but had hitherto refused to do certain others) hold the toasting fork, with a piece of bread at the end, in his mouth; the toast in the rack being by this time all finished, and more being in request.

It was just as the dog dropped the fork for the third time that the telegram was brought in. Longley's changed colour and growing whiteness, as he took the ominous-looking envelope, tore it open, and read the few terrible words within, brought dead silence into the room.

He got up, and pushed the dog on one side.

"It's from Riverswood," he said, throwing the paper down before Mr. Glanville;

“where’s my hat? where’s the time-table? Deuce take it, where *is* the time-table?” He had not a vestige of colour left in his face, and his voice was entirely altered.

“I’ll look for you,” said Glanville; “but I’m afraid you’ve just missed a train.—No—look here, you may catch it if you race.”

Rochefort snatched his hat. “I leave you host, Ernest,” he said; and in another moment was out of the room, and on his way to the station. When he arrived there, the train had been gone just two minutes.

He could not endure the idea of going back to his rooms, where that telegram still lay on the disordered breakfast-table. He felt as if it would be like going back to the sight of the knife that had stabbed him. He walked the platform for three awful hours, repeating to himself, till the words lost all significance: “Thrown from his horse and *dragged*.” He knew what being dragged in the stirrup by a horse, probably wild from fright or excitement, meant. He did not believe there was a vestige of hope left to him of seeing his father conscious, if

he even saw him alive. Not long after he had reached the station, Glanville came up in a cab, saying he could settle to nothing, and wanted to find out whether he had caught the train.

“Have you tried whether they will put on a ‘special’?” he asked, after they had taken one turn to the end of the platform, together.

“Yes, I spoke to the station-master at once, but they cannot, on account of something that’s going on at A——. There are excursion trains constantly. There is nothing for it but to wait till the express comes in.”

Mr. Longley lingered in a state of total unconsciousness until about half an hour before the carriage was sent down to Gowerford to meet the train. Once he uttered a few inarticulate sounds, and his wife bent her ear to his lips to try and catch the words—if words they were. But she could distinguish nothing, and he never spoke again.

There was a grand funeral; such as had

been given to the dead masters of Riverswood since the first fell on one of the great battle-fields of England. But after it was all over, Rochefort said to somebody,

“I hope that when I die they will let me be carried to my grave by a few men I have known ; and that a dozen or two of people who have loved me will take their hats off as the parson says ‘dust to dust,’ and that that will be all.”

For a few days the glad, warm daylight was shaded from every room as if it were a forbidden thing ; there was a strange inappropriateness in the wild sounding rush of the breeze, in the songs and twitter of birds, and in the glitter of sunlight upon rippling or splashing water : footsteps in the great house were hushed ; and poor Mrs. Longley sat, white and tear-stained and wretched-looking, upon her upstairs sofa. Gradually, however, came the re-assumption of old ways and habits, the departure of guests who felt that they had come “to mourn,” and who dare not be cheerful ; the feeling that life must be begun afresh, that the

blank left by the departed must be somehow covered over, planted upon, made as little naked and visible to the world and to themselves, as was his grave. This was possible ; but to *fill up* a blank, however small, however narrow, made by death is never possible.

CHAPTER II.

ONE morning, four or five weeks after the events just recorded—a lovely summer's morning, when the whole land was full of swaying wind and changeless sunshine, and the smell of hay and field-blossoms—Rochefort was in his "gun-room," when, just as he was flushing his face by the exertion of drawing on his boots, one of the footmen, coming in, said,

"Mr. Forrest has called, sir, and wishes to know if he can see you."

"Mr. Forrest?" repeated Rochefort, looking up.

"Yes, sir. He is in the library, sir."

"Confound it," was the master's muttered exclamation. He had been busy with letters

and papers all morning, and the night before had "assisted" at one of his mother's violent hysterical fits, which had kept him up late, and had worried him as well. He was longing for the fresh air and a gallop; as a school-boy of fourteen longs for twelve o'clock to strike.

"Tell Haversham to put up the horse till I want her, then," he said after he had stamped on his last boot, and risen; and then he walked towards the library.

The library at Riverswood was a grand, long-shaped room, with old Tudor windows, opening upon a wide expanse of lawn, shaded with oak and chestnut trees, and sloping gradually towards the lake. It was filled half with books, and half with old English and Italian cabinets; on the slabs, or through the open doors of which, were seen endless specimens of old china, and bric-à-brac of every description, which had been collected in Italy, in France, and in England, by Rochefort's grandfather, who had been for the last thirty years of his life an antiquarian as well as a miser. It was

impossible, however, for any succeeding generation of Longleys to blame him either for his niggardliness or his old-art mania, considering that he had very much enriched the family by his persistence in both tastes. He had lived till many years after his son's marriage; and had not allowed the re-clothing of the library floor until his daughter-in-law fell down by tripping her foot in one of the holes of its antiquated Turkey carpet. After this he supplied it with a new one, and even went to the length of getting new tapestry covers for the two carved oak tables; and since this epoch the library had been a fine room. Rochefort used it more than either his grandfather or father had done. They had kept their papers and account books, and transacted most of their business, in a smaller adjoining room, which was furnished in more modern and far less handsome fashion, but Rochefort had a dislike to the room, and wrote generally in the library at a table near the end window; the light just shaded from his head by old crimson velvet curtains, through which it

filtered as if through painted glass—and with the ever changing hues of lawn and lake and stirring trees before his eyes.

“One *feels* as if one were master of Riverswood,” he said to his mother one day, as he stooped and petted one of his dogs on the library hearth-rug, “if one works here. The other room might be in any London street, but for the view. It is like an office.”

“But you make such a litter here with your papers, Rochefort,” complained his mother, “and your poor father always liked the room to be fit to show any one into.”

“I only litter one table, mother; and I can’t breathe, or think, or feel, in a small room. Yes, I feel one thing—I feel impatient and irritable.”

“The office-room isn’t *small*, Rochefort.”

“It’s small to me, mother,” he said, rising from his chair, and laughing as he touched her cheek gently with his finger; “and it oppresses me in some way. I can’t tell you how exactly. But I know that if I am to do any good work, it must be done in my own way.”

Mr. Forrest, the estate-agent, was standing upon the rug when Rochefort entered.

"I am afraid you were going out," he said, as he extended his hand. "Your man thought you were writing in here, or I would not have sent my horse round."

"I was going out, but it doesn't matter," answered Rochefort, seating himself on a low chair by the fire-place, resting one elbow on his knee, and his sunburnt, handsome, rather haughty young face on his hand. "Of course I am perfectly ready to hear whatever you have to say. My horse can wait."

"Well then, Mr. Rochefort, not to make you wait longer than I can help, and to begin on my business at once, have you ever heard your father speak of a man named Grey, who rents—or rather lives on—the White House farm, near Leyton?"

"I think I remember the name. I know the farm well enough."

"Do you? Well, of course, I hav'n't the least idea yet how much you know of your estates; what with Oxford, and your long foreign

tour, and what not—and then this very—this very lamentable affair coming so suddenly you know—you must excuse me if I pre-suppose ignorance now and then.”

“How long has this man been there?”

“Ten or twelve years—I forget exactly—and has never paid his rent regularly for the last two. He was always behindhand, and I don’t like that sort of tenant. I wanted your father to eject him, and he kept promising me it should be done. But it never was. Your father acted in an unaccountable way sometimes.”

“And what’s the matter now? He hasn’t paid his rent again, I suppose?”

“Scarcely a stiver of it, either last half-year or this. I wouldn’t bother you about it before, but now I hope you’ll be guided by me.”

“Have you just come from there?”

“Yes; went over there this morning early.”

“What is it that’s wrong? Doesn’t the man understand farming?” inquired Rochefort.

“Yes, he understands it. He’s rather a superior sort of fellow in some ways. But I never liked him much—and he votes on the wrong side,” concluded the agent.

Rochefort laughed.

“On the Liberal side, you mean?” he said.

“Liberal?” retorted Mr. Forrest, changing his position impatiently on the rug; “you may call it ‘Liberal’ if you like, but I call such opinions as some of these fellows hold no better than high treason.”

“But you don’t mean the man’s a red-hot radical, do you?” asked Rochefort; “I didn’t know the farming interest of Gowerfordshire could produce a politician of that colour?”

“He’s a Whig, at any rate, that’s what he is,” returned Mr. Forrest, with some increase of impatience; “and his farm’s going to ruin. I told your father so, but never could get him to go over and see things for himself.”

“He was quite unfit to be worried about

business for some time before he died," interrupted Rochefort.

"You are quite right, but then why didn't he let me manage? That's all I complain of. I don't want to see your property going to the deuce, even if you and your father seem to care nothing about it;" and Mr. Forrest, who had seated himself a minute or two before, now rose, looking rather red and hot in the face.

"I beg your pardon, Forrest, if I have said anything to imply doubt of that for a moment. I hope you will continue to advise me for many years to come."

"Well, well," said the agent, considerably mollified, "I'm glad to hear you say so. I don't want anything of yours to go to the deuce, as I said before, while I am alive to prevent it."

"Thank you. By the way Forrest, will you have some lunch with me?" continued Rochefort, jumping up to ring the bell; "I have only just found out that I am dangerously hungry. I have been so delayed that it is nearly two o'clock. You will—

that's right. Then we will have it in here. My mother is in her room to-day."

The cook at Riverswood being one of those admirable women who really can send in a cold fowl, a ham, a salad, and a loaf of bread in about the same space of time as it has taken to order them, the two gentlemen were soon doing justice to the viands before named.

"Well," said Mr. Longley presently, "and now tell me the rest about this man. What's the rent of his farm?"

"It's a small place," returned the agent, "and the rent's seventy pounds. But the man lost his wife about a year and a half ago, and he's never been the same since. She was an industrious, sensible sort of woman, and she always managed to get a good profit out of the butter, and poultry, and so on. It helped them on a great deal, and of course all that's lost to him now. He's got a daughter-in-law with him that's perfectly good for nothing. The fellow's to be pitied, certainly. He had been a bailiff to somebody before he took the farm, and

had saved money, but he was inclined to be rather speculative. He bought implements, and so on, that he had no business with. And then last year's dry spring ruined his turnip crop, as it did everybody else's—and his son's taken to drinking and bad ways, and is a great trouble to him. Altogether the man's got into a broken-down, dispirited way, and hasn't half the go in him he used to have."

"Poor fellow!" said Rochefort, as he helped himself to a great spoonful of salad.

"Poor fellow!" echoed the agent, looking up rather sharply; "well, I don't know. There are poor fellows, sir, and there are poor fellows; and I don't approve of a man that lets his farm go to ruin, and votes against his landlord. I can tell you, it made my blood boil when I went over there this morning. I told him what I should do."

"How's his hay?" inquired Rochefort, for want of something better to say.

"Oh, bad—everything's bad with him now. The man tells me he works as hard as he can, but he's not had his health lately.

In fact he had an illness in the winter, and there has been the doctor to pay—it was worry of mind brought that on, I fancy. In fact, Mr. Longley, it would be no kindness to let the man remain any longer, and we can't do it. Let him have notice, and sell himself up, and we shall be free of him."

Mr. Forrest rose, and began buttoning up his coat.

"What will the man do?" asked Rochefort, rising also, and leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Do?—I'm sure I can't say," answered the agent, as he pulled on his gloves; "the son had better walk the straightest way to the gallows, or to the next horse-pond, I should think. He's been robbing his father right and left."

"Robbing him—how?"

"Getting at grain and selling it. Grain's easily taken. The fellow's an out-and-out scamp. Well, good-bye, then, Mr. Rochefort—what is it to be?"

"Shall you be at home to-morrow morn-

ing?" asked Longley, moving from the fire-place, and taking his hands out of his pockets.

"Morning? No, I'm afraid not, nor afternoon either; but in the evening—yes. And of course I could put off anything for you if you——"

"Oh, no. I will ride over in the evening; it will just suit me, and I will speak to you then. Let us go round to the stables; I can mount there."

But after seeing Mr. Forrest into his trap, the master said he would change his whip, and went in and sat down in his gun-room for a quarter of an hour, leaning his arms on his knees, and looking fixedly at the dark staining of the floor, surrounding the rug on which he rested his feet. When his cogitations were over, he went out to the stables again, whistling, mounted his horse, and set off on the road towards Leyton.

It was a glorious afternoon, not too hot, but with a fresh wind blowing the trees, the grass, the corn, as he cantered along.

Over the blue sky, white and grey clouds chased each other; the sun shone with dazzling light on the ripples of the river that shot between the arched, moss-grown bridges, then spread its silver breadth between banks of perfect green, and through branches of drooping ash and willow. Rochefort, who was passionately fond of the country, fond of being alone, and a fine horseman, rode on, his dogs galloping at his side, in a state of almost perfect enjoyment. He reached the lane leading to the White House Farm before either he or his horse had lost a fraction of the spirit with which they set off, and he was just turning the corner when the animal shied violently at something or somebody standing back against the hedge.

“You should never stand at a corner to scare a horse like that,” exclaimed Rochefort, a little annoyed, when he had patted and soothed his excitable mare into her usual mood again; “it’s better to come on, you know, and show yourself. Can you tell me if I am right for the White House

Farm? I suppose that's it just in front of us?"

"That's it, sir. Did you want anything there, sir?"

"Yes, I want to see the tenant, Gray."

"I am the man, sir."

Rochefort looked at him. A respectable, rather grave-looking man, his hair tinged with grey; a tall, strong figure, a manner at once respectful, quiet, and somewhat depressed.

"I'm afraid I was rather hasty just now about my horse. The animal is very nervous at times."

"Don't mention it, sir," said the man.

He had seen Rochefort several times before, and, of course, knew him.

"I was coming to see you," continued Longley, after a moment's pause. "And if you'll show me up to your place, we'll put up my horse for half an hour, and I'll go over your fields with you while we have a little talk."

Gray turned slowly round, after having replaced on his head the hat which he had

held lowered since Rochefort began to speak.

They went on for a little way in perfect silence. At last the farmer said, in a voice that struggled hard to be firm;

“I know what you have come about, Mr. Longley, and the sooner it’s over the better. I am a broken-hearted man, but all I can say is, I’ve done my best—I have been very unfortunate.”

Rochefort did not speak for a minute or two, then he said,

“Do you mind, Mr. Gray, telling me how old you are?”

“Six-and-forty, sir, last birth-day.”

“Why, you have, perhaps, thirty years to live yet! You must not begin to be broken-hearted so soon.”

“I hope I have not as much as twenty years before me, sir,” returned the farmer, with a faint smile. “I shouldn’t well know what to do with them.”

“And I hope I have a *long life* before me,” said the young landlord, rather gravely.

“Do you, sir ?—Ah, but you are different to me ; in every way different. Life is a fine thing for you, sir ; it won’t bring much more happiness to me.”

“You had a great loss some time ago, I know,” said Rochefort.

The man answered nothing ; he walked along silently by the horse’s side, but presently Longley saw the coarse sleeve of the weather-beaten coat drawn across his eyes, and there was a desperate effort to clear the throat from something that stuck there.

The farm-house was soon reached, the horse put up, and Gray and his young landlord started to walk over the fields. Rochefort was not only interested in farming, but determined to understand it ; and as they walked and talked together, Gray almost forgot his troubles, warmed to his subject, and spoke and felt as he had not done for years. Before they had gone over four fields, the young landlord felt as if he knew his man, and the tenant certainly knew something of his landlord. They

spent, perhaps, three hours together, not confining themselves to the narrow boundaries of the White House Farm, but walking through the next one to it, which was also part of the Riverswood property, scrambling through a thicket and game preserves, climbing a low hill for the view, looking at the outside of two or three model cottages, comparing hay and wheat crops, and so on, and finally returning to the White House by a considerable round. As they neared it, Rochefort said,

“ You shall hear from me in a day or two, Mr. Gray ; but in the mean time I think you must prepare yourself for leaving this farm.”

There was a short pause, after which, Gray replied,

“ I am quite prepared to hear you say so, sir.”

“ Yes, I am afraid there is no doubt that the place is going to the bad. And I don't see how you can ever recover yourself here, as things are.”

“ How about the rent, sir ?”

“ Oh, I will write to you about all that, or Mr. Forrest will.” But observing the fall in the man’s face, directly he mentioned the agent’s name, Longley added, “ I see you would like me to write myself. Well, I can easily do so ; and now, good-bye ”—gathering his reins up in one hand, and holding out the other.

“ I don’t believe you mean to deal hardly with me, Mr. Longley,” said Gray, raising his hat once more, as he looked up into the the fine young face. His voice faltered as he spoke.

“ I hope not,” said Rochefort, “ indeed, I am sure not ; but I must be just, remember—just, I mean, to my other tenants. As I act to one I must act to all, up to a certain point. Good morning.”

A few minutes after, the farmer, from his home-field, could see the young horse and rider, and the noble dog, bounding along the smooth white road below. Sorrow and disappointment and loneliness had made him bitter, and he muttered to himself, “ Ay—master and man, rich and poor,

happy and miserable, all the luck one way and all the sorrow another!—'The old story.' And he turned into his dreary house.

Mr. Forrest would have thought the man's "Whiggism" had reached a point which should be made actionable. But the day came, when the "man" was rich compared to the "master" whom he now envied; when he thought of the bright June afternoon, the proud, gay young rider, and of the bitter and repining words with which he had looked on both, and would almost have given half his own joy, to see the sunshine which is from the heart, upon that face again.

The next day, before twelve o'clock, Rochefort walked across a couple of fields, and had a little chat with his old bailiff, who was watching the shaking up of a field of prime hay. When he came home, he sat down at his desk in the library, his dogs at his feet, and wrote a note as follows:

"SIR,—I have a bailiff, seventy-five years of age, on my home-farm at Riverswood, who

has been on the place about thirty years, but who is now somewhat past work, and cannot properly superintend the farm-affairs. I offer you the post of under-bailiff, on condition that until the time when I pension off my old servant you will act under his—which are my—directions, and treat him with consideration and respect. I will give you —— pounds a year, and should you choose to accept my offer (which you may find of ultimate advantage to you) I shall deduct gradually from the sum I pay you weekly the three-quarters' rent which is due to me. My agent will come down to the White House in the course of a day or two, and make whatever arrangements are necessary for your leaving, and for your selling up. I expressly stipulate that should you choose to accept my offer, your son does not, at any time, or in any way, make your house his home. I do not want to see him on or near my place. Truly yours,

“A. R. LONGLEY.”

Grey did not like the term “under-bailiff,” but he believed he should like Riverswood, and the master of Riverswood. He believed also that it would only depend on himself how long he “acted under” an old man’s orders. Rochefort had written “orders” first in his letter, and “directions” afterwards. He did not mean always to farm Riverswood according to old Davison’s lights, but he had no intention of changing much at present. He would “take stock” of his new man first. It is probable that both he and Grey understood each other. At any rate, the tenant who voted, and who always continued to vote, against his master—of whom sorrow had made a broken man, but to whom work and happiness restored the character and energy of ten years ago—became bailiff to him, and served him—and I hope is serving him now—with strong fidelity, and with judgment that rarely erred.

CHAPTER III.

ONE August evening, Mrs. Longley was sitting wearily on her sofa, with a volume from Mudie's on her knee, and her over-fed lap-dog at her side. The window near which she sat was open, and the delicious air blew in the scent of roses and verbena, and wafted the lace curtains softly to and fro.

Mrs. Longley felt life to be dreadfully insipid. How uninteresting it was, to be for ever doomed to this "far niente" existence ; to be for ever waited on in exactly the same way by the same people ; never to want anything that you couldn't have, and yet never to have anything that you wanted !

It was nearly dinner-time now. Well,

she never enjoyed her dinner from one year's end to the other as much as a little scare-crow boy who had a great piece of bread and an onion, or, for a rich treat, a heavy pasty, with a half-baked apple in it. She believed sometimes she was not half as happy as her housemaids. They were as busy as bees all morning, and had all the afternoon and evening to sew and laugh and chatter together. She didn't believe they ever had indigestion, or fits of horrible low spirits, such as she, poor woman, was condemned to. She had felt ennuyée enough when poor Arthur was alive; but now—*now it was dreadful*. And these stupid novels, one so like another, only gave her the headache, and made her feel good for nothing.

How happy Rochefort seemed! Ah, it was much better to be a man. Men were *so strong*. Even when they complained of being delicate, or of having this or that the matter with them, they could generally do anything they liked. At least, so it seemed to her. And as for Rochefort, every

day seemed a separate pleasure to him. He was always busy about something, unless he were driving her out, or riding out himself. And even that driving!—How tired she was of *always* driving. She envied the village women whom she saw trudging along so stoutly from market, with their baskets filled with the groceries, the calico, the new pair of boots, the bright mug for the baby, the coloured handkerchief for “father;” just bought in town, and carried home to be the delight and wonder of the family for a week to come. How healthy and happy they always looked!

Once, when she had felt rather faint out driving, her husband had stopped the carriage at a cottage by the roadside, and the footman had got down to ask for a glass of water for her. It was at a thatched cottage (she did not know how hot a thatched cottage is in summer, and how cold and often wet in winter), and there were flower-pots in the windows. The young woman came out, blushing like a peony, with some clear water in a bright, bronzed mug, with raised

pink flowers on it. (Shades of our grandmothers ! Where, we ask, are all those resplendent mugs, cups, and teapots, made of this glittering, almost golden brown, with blue or pink flowers in relief upon the sides : and why are they never to be got now, and only seen once or twice in a lifetime, in some old woman's corner cupboard, where, I think, they beat the best china hollow ; or, possibly, among the stock in the oldest crockery shop in some remote country town ?)

Through the open door of the cottage Mrs. Longley saw a table spread for tea. There was a coarse, clean cloth on it, some brilliant cups and saucers, and a piece of cold bacon. A little fire was blazing and a kettle singing on it. The young woman's husband sat by the fire, looking very shame-faced and rather loutish, but young, strong, hearty, and as if he would do full justice to that piece of bacon as soon as the grand folks were off—and he had a little girl on his knee. In the garden there was southern-

wood and sweet briar, a moss-rose tree, and some sweet-william.

It was almost a model cottage of the old fashioned sort, and long may it be before the hideous new red-brick dwellings, with slated roof, straight, porchless door, four unshaded windows, like eyes without eyelids, and a general air of staring nakedness, take entirely the place of those sweet, rustic loves of our youth !

Mrs. Longley, having nothing else to think about, thought of that cottage, and of its occupants, and of the little round table spread for tea, nearly all the way home. And that young husband and wife would probably soon have half-a-dozen chubby little faces around their bit of a table and their coarse loaf. It was true she did not wish for another son ; one boy was enough ; but the poor rich woman pined for a daughter, that blessing that was never to be hers. And so, primarily, because she had no work to do in the world (having sought herself out none), and secondly, be-

cause she was not naturally of a cheerful disposition, poor Mrs. Longley was not at all a happy woman. She would almost have died before she would have openly confessed it. It was always "circumstances" that were at fault; and though riches did not make her happy, she was as rigidly tenacious of the luxuries and privileges of her rank as any woman who ever stepped in shoes.

She dreamt, in moments of languid sentimentalism (caused chiefly by indigestion or want of exercise), that the cottagers on her husband's estate were more favoured by earth and heaven than herself; but she never crossed the threshold of those cottages to shew sympathy in distress, or give relief in sudden trial. Her alms-giving was done by proxy, merely because it was expected of Mrs. Longley, of Riverswood, to give away a certain sum every year. What feeling she had had been shared between her husband and son, and her husband now being gone, Rochefort had the whole of it.

We have said that she lay on her sofa,

nauseated by her novel, with nothing (that she was aware of) waiting for her to do, having had no appetite for her breakfast, and knowing to a mournful certainty that she would have no appetite for her dinner. We can imagine no state of mind or being more utterly to be pitied, or more sorrowfully pitiable. The existence of a woman past middle-life, who is an invalid, who has lost her husband, who sleeps ill, who has no tastes, and yet who is simply worldly, who does nothing but drive out, fall into a state of half somnolence or entire depression over a novel, and sit twice a day at the head of a dining-table, to wish she could eat as other people do, and to swallow a little bit herself (for which she probably feels worse afterwards)—is an existence the manifold horrors of which words are powerless to describe. May God save her who writes, and every woman who may read, these pages from such a fate! But this is an entirely involuntary digression.

In the midst of Mrs. Longley's vague reflections, the drawing-room door was opened,

and Rochefort, hot and sunburnt from his corn field, his collarless shirt showing a fine bronzed throat, with no waistcoat, and an old coat on, threw himself lazily on to an ottoman, and taking up a number of *Punch* began to fan himself.

“What a figure you are, Rochefort,” said his mother, roused however to a little life by seeing him enter, and turning her eyes on him. “Do you know the dressing-bell has rung?”

“I’ve been watching my reaper, mamma. I wish you would come and see it. It would do you good.”

“I’ve just told you the dressing-bell has rung,” reiterated Mrs. Longley.

Rochefort pulled his watch out of his belt and looked at the time. “It’s all right, mamma. I’ll go up in a minute. But say you’ll come and see my reaper. Why on earth have we never had one before? They’re first rate?”

“Your father wasn’t as much interested in farming as you are, Rochefort, and I suppose Davison didn’t want one,”

“ Well, he likes it now, and Grey’s no end pleased with the thing.”

“ Rochefort,” said his mother, “ you’ll lose your watch to a certainty, if you go in that way without waistcoat.”

“ Nothing of the sort, mamma. Look, I pull the guinea at the end of the chain through this button-hole. It’s quite safe.”

“ Through that button-hole? Why, how can you manage that?”

“ I just cut the hole larger, mamma.”

“ Ah, exactly! Then that’s what’s spoiling all your shirts. Alison showed me three this morning. We couldn’t think what had come to them. Don’t be so thoughtless, Rochefort.”

“ Mother, you never will talk about my reaper, or anything else I get,” pleaded the poor boy.

“ Well, go and dress for dinner, and I’ll listen to you as much as you like, then.”

“ What nonsense it all is,” said Rochefort to himself, as he lounged out of the room, and went very slowly upstairs; “ as if I shouldn’t do if I washed my hands! I

shall want to go out again in half an hour."

In the evening Mrs. Longley was roused from a state of semi-somnolence by her son throwing down the paper, and saying rather suddenly, "Mother!——"

"Well?" said Mrs. Longley, hardly opening her eyes.

"I want to write and ask one of my friends down here. You won't mind, will you?"

"Before the shooting, Rochefort?"

"No, not before the shooting. For the 1st, you know — that's in about two weeks."

"Of course, you can do as you like," said his mother.

"Well, but it won't bother you?"

"No, not if it's any one you like. Who shall you ask?"

"Glanville, I suppose. Silverthorne's in Scotland."

"Ernest Glanville?"

"Yes."

"I should rather like to see *him*," re-

turned Mrs. Longley, "as I've heard so much about him."

"You would? That's right. Well, here goes then. Where's some paper and ink, mamma?"

"On my writing-table in the next room. I must get fresh chintzes if you're going to have friends here, Rochefort."

"Oh no, mother," he called out from the little room, "you needn't bother yourself. These are all right."

"They're *filthy*, Rochefort. I know what it is in shooting-time. There are always gentlemen coming in, and the room must be decent."

"Why do you never show the covers? What *are* the covers?" asked her son.

"Silk; and you and Mr. Glanville would ruin them in a week, if you came in from the fields in the state *you* are usually in. Besides, silk covers look as if your drawing-room was only used three times a year; they are *parvenus* for the country."

"Get the chintzes then, mamma, for

goodness' sake. — Well, look here, I've asked him for the 1st. You won't forget?"

"No, I won't forget."

When the master came in again from writing the letter (and he was a very long time away, long enough, as she thought, for the inditing of two letters at least—perhaps he *had* written two), his mother began—
"Can you drive me to Gowerford to-morrow? I must get this chintz, and several other things."

Rochefort became suddenly rather red; but that might be because he stooped down to play with the lap-dog.

"Can't you go? What is it?" asked his mother.

"Oh, only that I had some business in Leyton to-morrow, and intended to go there. In fact I have written to that effect."

"Hav'n't you been to Leyton very often lately?"

"Well, mamma, perhaps I have," said her son, looking up and laughing; "I have been to a great many places often, lately."

“Yes; but I think you know what I mean. It seems odd, that you should so often have to ride that way, and especially when I so particularly want you to go with me.”

“Won’t Wednesday do for you, mamma? I’ll go with you on Wednesday; and the chintzes won’t take a fortnight.”

“You don’t know how long they’ll take, Rochefort. You might allow *me* to be the best judge of that.”

“Mamma, it’s much greater fun for you, going on Wednesdays! You see a little variety then, because everybody’s there; every other day it’s as dull as ditch-water.”

“Do you think I go there for *fun*, Rochefort?” inquired his mother, with almost an awful tone in her voice; “I never go anywhere for *fun*. I only go where it’s my duty.”

“Oh mamma!” groaned he; “don’t be so dreadfully solemn—please don’t!”

“Then you can’t go with me to-morrow, Rochefort? That is the end of it.”

“ I won’t disappoint you again, mamma, if I can help it ; and I want to go on Wednesday myself. Say yes.”

“ Well then, yes, Rochefort.”

“ That’s a good mother ! There, give me a kiss. And now don’t stay up any longer, you’re looking as worn as if you were an old woman. And you know you’ve got to be my pretty, darling little mother for fifty years to come yet, and more if you like.”

Mrs. Longley put up her thin hand, covered with magnificent rings, and parted the hair gently from his forehead.

“ You must be a good boy, you know, Rochefort. You are all I have now.”

Her voice faltered.

“ Of course, mamma ; and you’ll be a good mother, won’t you ? and we’ll never leave each other, or love each other a bit less than we do now.”

He had to clear his voice as he finished speaking. Mrs. Longley took out her scented handkerchief, and put it to her eyes. That was more than her son

could stand, and he went out of the room. After a minute he came back, however, to say—

“ You’re getting dull, you know, mother, with not going out enough. Say you’ll come and see my reaper to-morrow—I know it’ll do you good. Will you ?”

“ Yes, Rochefort” — from behind the pocket-handkerchief, and in a faint voice.

Her son went into the library, and walked up and down for an hour.

While he is doing so, we will try and draw such a portrait of him as is possible in a few words, premising, however, that Rochefort’s was one of those faces which it is almost impossible to draw and to do justice to, in pen and ink, or otherwise. A painter would probably have fallen into the mistake of making a simply handsome man of him ; and Rochefort was not entirely handsome, though ladies often called and thought him so. But then, he had been heir to ten thousand a year ever since he was born.

He had a dark face ; eyes with plenty

of flashing, varying expression ; and a firm, sweet, resolute mouth and chin. His figure was slight and erect, not much above middle height ; and in every easy movement—in the proud, firm set of the head and neck ; in the shape of the strong, white hand ; in the general air of slight “hauteur,” perceptible in his whole bearing, and scarcely ever lost in any moment of condescension or self-forgetfulness—could be traced the thorough “gentleman,” by birth, by breeding, and by nature.

Rochefort Longley had done what many another man of strong head and heart has done before him, and will do again : he had fallen in love with a beautiful woman, who was only a woman, and a vain and foolish one, but whom he believed to be an angel. By the power of a sweet voice, whose tones had stirred the trembling passion of his heart almost since the first time he had heard her speak, two or three years ago ; by the power of lovely features, and of eyes which seemed to tell of a depth of soul *somewhere*—as so many eyes belonging to

soulless women do—and perhaps—dare we confess it?—a little by the power of the most perfect taste in dress that was ever yet possessed by a girl, who devoted all her thoughts and skill and half her time to it, and whose mother thought nothing of spending the bank-notes that ought to have gone to the butcher with the milliner and draper—to all this power combined, Rochefort had yielded his strong man's heart—yielded it to a woman incapable of understanding, of aiding, or of really loving him, to her life's end.

As we have said, he paced the library floor for an hour. His thoughts were not peaceable ones, as could be discerned by the constantly recurring trouble of the brow, the flushing of the cheek, the restless, harassed light of the eye.

“What am I to do?” he kept thinking to himself. “I cannot tell her yet, and yet I hate trying to deceive her. How much is she deceived? Sometimes, I am afraid, almost as much as I have ever wished. Sometimes I fancy she guesses it

all. At any rate, she does not suspect *the truth*;" and then he threw himself into his arm-chair, thrust a hand into each pocket, and meditated for a long time.

"I must tell her at Christmas," he resolved at last, when his thoughts recurred to his mother (they had been wandering far away from her); "but I believe it will half kill her. She will almost wish I had never been born. Why on earth is it in the *law of things* that women in one position should dislike and despise women (as good or better than themselves) who happen to be in another position—that is, if a man wants one of them for his wife?"

While her son revolved these and other questions in his somewhat perturbed mind, poor Mrs. Longley tossed upon a thorny bed, and courted sleep in vain.

When, at last, she went off into uneasy slumber, visions of clergymen in white, attended by violinists and cornet-players, and followed by young ladies in ball costume, and lastly, by a horrid, shabby little hump-backed girl, whom Rochefort led

before her very eyes to the altar, haunted her troubled rest, and, when she awoke in the morning, made her almost hate the light of day.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. ERNEST GLANVILLE arrived in due course on the 1st day of September. He was a very good-looking fellow, tall, with fashionable, graceful manners, a rich, pleasant laugh, and plenty of light-brown hair upon his face, in the way of beard, moustache, and whisker. How he and Rochefort had become friends neither of them knew, unless it was that they had been thrown together, and afterwards did not care for the trouble of separating themselves. They were fellow-collegians, and had rooms adjoining; and this, as everybody knows, explains a great deal. They argued, they smoked, they rode out, and they laughed a good deal together, and

they had never yet quarrelled. But perhaps this was because they had rarely, if ever, talked seriously. One of them cared little to “air” the subjects on which he felt the most ; and the other allowed himself to feel and to think seriously very little. Ernest confided pretty openly in his friend, but he always reproached Longley with reserve.

“I am not reserved,” the latter would say sometimes ; “but I had often rather listen than talk. Don’t you like having a listener ? I often sympathise with—or at least understand—all you are saying, even if I don’t speak.”

Glanville had read much, but studied little ; he was clever, but not profound ; he had easy principles, and not very good ones ; but to weak-minded men he had a way of making his principles and ideas appear always the right and natural ones. His fascination lay in his pleasant ways, in his general amiability, in his susceptibility, in his tenor voice, and, women would have added, in his beauty. But that was, of

course, the last thing that men liked in him. He was the second son of a ——shire baronet, and his father intended him for the Church. Ernest, however, did not intend himself for it, if he could by any means keep out of it; and he constantly suggested to his father that the rich living which the latter was holding in leash for him should be given to his “cousin Tom.” Sir Charles Glanville, however, did not see “the joke,” as Ernest expressed it, of giving it to his “cousin Tom;” and the ladies of the Glanville family were constantly urging upon Ernest the advisability of taking orders with as little delay as possible.

“You ought to think *seriously* about it, Ernest,” his married sister would say to him.

“You know you needn’t *do* much,” the unmarried one would urge; “and you need only wear very small white ties, as if you were going to a dinner-party. You could go shooting, you know, all the same, and clergymen can wear coats like any one else

now, *if they're not 'high ;'* and you needn't be 'high.' ”

“ Ah, but the waistcoats ! ” Ernest would answer, “ I could never stand the waistcoats, Augusta. ” And this would generally end the discussion. En attendant, the young gentleman was supposed to live on his allowance ; and grumbled incessantly to his sisters and mother, at its not being larger.

On the second evening after he had come to Riverswood, Ernest and his host were sitting alone together in the dining-room after dinner. The dessert was laid as Mr. Longley had always chosen to have it, on the dark, polished mahogany ; and when does dessert look half as pretty now as it used to do when that old fashion was general and when the bright cut glass, and rare china, and glistening fruits were reflected on a surface like an almost black and faultless mirror ?

“ Arthur, ” began his friend—he had a foolish conceit for calling him Arthur, because nobody else did ; “ do you know you

are a very uncommunicative fellow? You have never told me yet what your position is,—I mean as regards the property and so on. What is it?"

"Don't you know?" inquired Rochefort, who was leaning rather absently against the mantelpiece.

"Not accurately. Is the property entailed?"

"Most of it is."

"In the usual way, I suppose?"

"Yes, in the male line. It has descended from father to son for many generations, and I hope it will do so for many more," said the young master.

"What is it worth to you a year?" inquired his friend; "do you mind telling me?"

"Everything together, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Rather more than ten thousand a year."

"What a lucky dog you are!" exclaimed Ernest, with a half sigh. "And of course the house is yours, too?" he added.

"Yes, of course the house is mine, and

nearly all that is in it. My mother has a handsome annuity out of the estate ; and the pictures, and the plate and all that sort of thing, are divided between us, during her life. So that you see at any time, if she wishes it, she can go away, and set up house for herself."

"Should you like her to do it?"

"No ; certainly I should not like her to do it. What do you mean ?" asked Rochefort.

"I only took up your own expression, or rather what I thought you meant by it. It doesn't matter—it was my mistake. And so," he continued, after ruminating for a few minutes, "you are your own master, with ten thousand a year, and this lovely place, at two and twenty?"

"Exactly," answered the other, who could not help laughing at his friend's air of reflection ; "you have stated the case accurately. Does it affect you in any way ?"

"By Jove !" answered Ernest, looking at him,—with his chin resting on his hand, and

with a strange mixture of envy, consideration, and something like respect, in his face ; “ by Jove—you *are* a lucky fellow. I wish I were in your boots.”

“ Do you ? ” returned Rochefort carelessly, and a little dryly ; “ I had rather be in them myself, thank you.”

After this, there was a long silence ; as if each of the men had said what he was going to say, and Ernest stroked his long, fair moustache for some time with his hand. At last, looking up, he resumed,

“ I suppose you’ll be thinking of marrying before very long, sha’n’t you ? Any fellow would, in your position.”

Rochefort made no answer, and coloured a little.

“ What are you blushing for ? ” inquired his friend, looking at him.

“ Was I blushing ? ”

“ Like any girl of sixteen. What is it ? *Are* you in love ? ”

After a little pause, Rochefort answered,

“ Well—yes, I am, if you want to know.”

“Of course I want to know. But it’s nothing serious is it?”

“It’s been something serious to me, for half the time that I’ve known you.” Ernest gave a long—a very long whistle.

“Why have you never told me before?” he asked at length.

“I’ve been on the point of telling you a dozen times, but I didn’t; I don’t know why.”

“But it’s nothing more serious than being ‘in love’ I suppose?” asked Glanville. Rochefort went to the table and took up some biscuits, which he broke up, and began giving to the dogs.

“Here Nigel, here Floss, come and have your dessert.”

“You don’t mean to say,” continued Ernest—now with real astonishment and consternation expressed in his voice and countenance—“you don’t really mean to say that you have been and——”

“And done it?” said Rochefort, still stooping over the dogs. “Yes, I have.”

There was a silence of some minutes,

during which nothing was heard but the dogs munching their biscuit, and the fire peaceably flickering.

“But I say, Arthur, this is something frightful. You should have given me some warning, my dear fellow. I’m struck ‘of a heap,’ and feel quite giddy. Where’s the brandy?”

“What bosh!” exclaimed Rochefort. “Talk sense, if you want to talk, Glanville, and then I’ll talk to you.”

“Why, you’ve never been through a London season; you haven’t *seen* any girls; you’ve made nobody jealous; you’ve scarcely tasted life, and you’re never going to sacrifice yourself already at the altar? I can’t believe it. But are you joking?”

“Joking? No!” returned Longley, a little impatiently. “You go on as if you were some old grandmother who had set her heart on my marrying a fortune.”

“Why, this is worse and worse every minute! Hasn’t she even a fortune?”

“Of course she hasn’t,” exclaimed the

other, almost indignantly ; “ not a blessed sixpence ! ”

“ Oh —— ! ” said Ernest, looking and speaking as if he were rapidly becoming almost imbecile from repeated shocks to the nerves. “ Gracious goodness ! . . . Have you told your mother ? ”

At this juncture the door was opened by one of the class of human beings who are fated by nature, by habit, and by duty to interrupt every tête-à-tête that ever takes place on earth—within four walls—invariably at its most interesting point.

“ If you please, sir, tea is quite ready ; and missis says, would you object to coming at once, sir, as she is rather tired to-night ? ”

“ Let us go,” said Rochefort, throwing away his last bit of biscuit. “ It’s dull for my mother, being alone. No, she doesn’t know anything,” he added, as they crossed the hall, “ and it makes me feel as if I were a brute, that I haven’t told her.”

“ She won’t like it, do you think ? ”

“ *Like it ?* ” repeated Longley. “ It is understood that she won’t like it. And

I believe nothing will ever make her like it." They entered the drawing-room as he finished speaking.

About ten o'clock, when Mrs. Longley, who was not well, had retired, and when the two friends found themselves alone in the billiard-room, Ernest expected that his curiosity would be further gratified on the interesting subject of his friend's engagement. But Rochefort did not say a word more about it, and would not take a hint that Glanville would like to hear more. He smoked—which he did not often do—and gave himself up entirely to his game, hardly talking all the evening. At about half-past eleven they stopped playing, and Ernest began contemplating a return home at the end of a fortnight.

The next morning, however, when the two young men sallied forth with their guns, Glanville began—

"You were rather touchy with me last night, Arthur. What was the matter with you? You could hardly give me a civil answer."

“I am very sorry.”

“You are such a romantic fellow,” said Ernest, giving his friend’s shoulder a slight grip, and shaking it; “you fancy every woman is an angel. You know you do.”

“I am perfectly certain I have never said so—or thought so. But I am going to choose my own wife, be she angel, or be she not.”

“Oh, well, I can quite imagine it,” answered the other, carelessly; “but I suppose the lady in question is one whom we are both to suppose is a perfect angel—isn’t she?”

“Do you wish me to say that I have ever seen anything in her but what is perfection?” asked his friend, naturally parrying the question.

“Do I *wish*? Why don’t you answer me openly?” said Ernest, becoming a little nettled at his friend’s reticence. “I want to know what you feel, if you would tell me.”

“You didn’t want to know that last

night," returned Rochefort. "It was the last thing you cared about; and as it is the last thing any one else will care about, I felt as if the 'opposition' were getting rather strong for me already. However, we can't talk if we're going to shoot."

"Don't be a brute, Arthur! We're not shooting yet. I only want to know what is your idea of perfection. I am sure the future mistress of Riverswood ought to be something very tip-top to deserve you."

"Thanks for saying so. Over this stile, Ernest—it's the shortest way—and mind your gun. Oh, is that you, Gray?"

The man addressed took off his hat and wished the gentlemen good morning.

"I was just coming up to the house, sir, to ask for one of the horses to ride over to Leyton. I've been up to old Davison's, and his daughter's very ill."

("I shall hear something of Rochefort's own affairs before my visit's out, perhaps," reflected Mr. Glanville. "Confound all these people.")

"Ill! What's the matter with her?"

“Dreadful sore throat and fever, sir.”

“Why, it may be scarlet fever,” exclaimed Ernest, retiring suddenly several paces. Gray looked at him with a singular half-smile.

“It’s not that, sir. There’s no scarlet fever about, and she’s a grown woman. Can I have one of the horses, sir? The pony up at the farm lamed herself out in the field last night, and can’t go a yard.”

“Yes, you can have one, of course; and look here—call at the house and ask Mrs. Robinson to send her up some jelly, or whatever she could eat. They won’t be able to cook her anything up there. Good morning, and be off.”

Gray raised his hat, and was soon gone. He had an especial interest in “old Davison’s daughter.”

“I say, Arthur, that girl may have got diphtheria, if she hasn’t scarlet fever. Is there any diphtheria about?”

“Yes,” said Rochefort, coolly, “there nearly always is.”

“Well, that’s pleasant. Are you never nervous about it.”

“Nervous!—No, I’m never nervous about illness. It would be a pretty thing for me if I were. Well, here we are now, Ernest, and now for business.”

At about two o’clock in the afternoon, the young sportsmen—with their dead birds, and a rabbit or two beside them—threw themselves on the green moss of the wooded hill side; the thick shade of the scarcely stirring birches above them, and an exquisite prospect spread out before. Rochefort took off his hat, pushed his hair from his forehead, stretched himself at full length, exclaimed “Is not this lovely? Isn’t it enough to make one in love with life?”

“As you are, I suppose,” returned his friend, glancing at him, “or ought to be, with your confounded luck. Arn’t you going to eat anything?” he added, as he produced his own sandwich case, and sherry flask.

“Yes, directly.” Mr. Glanville munched away in silence for a few minutes; then he

said "Yours is a pretty place, Arthur; I don't wonder you are fond of it. This hill, too, is something quite uncommon."

"Yes, it's the greatest ornament of the property," said the young master, turning his head round, with a sort of fond pride; "it always looks lovely except in winter, when there is no snow. In summer there is always shade here, and nearly all through the year delicious emerald moss in quantities,—carts full; and wild flowers of every sort. I have loved this hill ever since I have loved anything."

"I wonder," said Ernest, after a pause, during which he had sat with his arms resting on his knees, and looking dreamily before him, "I wonder if I could ever settle down and be good for anything if I had such a place as this."

"Well, I have done very little good yet," said Rochefort, beginning to unscrew his wine flask, "but I hope to do some before I die. I believe I have an illimitable idea of what *two* can do—working together."

“Does she—does your *fiancée* take much interest in country affairs?” inquired his friend.

“She has not been tried yet, so I don’t know.”

“Teach in schools—visit the old women—addicted to sewing clubs—a good hand at broth—anything of that sort?” asked Glanville again, in a suggestive sort of way.”

“Don’t be such a fool, Ernest.”

“A fool? why, I thought I was saying quite the correct thing.—Arthur, do you remember a long conversation we once had together, in which you said that the woman you married should have a good head and heart, and the sense to appreciate the country, and make her home in it—even if she hadn’t a single good feature?”

“Did I?” inquired Rochefort, laughing. “Wasn’t that a long while ago?”

“Very soon after you came up. I used to tell the fellows you had said so.”

“You did, did you?” interrupted Longley, his hot blood mounting in a rush to

cheek, and brow, and temple, "and what did you do that for?"

"Why, my dear fellow, not one of them remembers a word. It was years ago. Don't, for goodness sake, be so touchy. I was only going to ask you if you had changed your opinion at all since then?"

"Well, as to the fancy for marrying a plain woman, yes—perhaps. As to all the rest, no, certainly not."

"She *has* head and heart, then?"

"God knows, I believe so."

"But she is a beauty?"

"*A beauty?*" echoed Rochefort, turning on him with a flushed face. "There is not a sculptor or painter on earth who would not fall on his knees only to catch the passing shadow of her face."

Ernest did not laugh now. The words were spoken with a strong, deep passion that made him turn his eyes on his friend's face, and look at him fixedly.

"Arthur," said he, "I beg your pardon. I have thought till now that it might be a sort of half-hearted affair, a sort of fancy

on your part—and so I made a joke of it. I am sorry I did.”

“Never mind. It’s rather a relief to talk to you at last. It’s all been throbbing and swelling in my heart for weeks past; and I don’t know how I should have borne it, if I hadn’t been working and walking and riding about from morning to night, to keep the fever down.”

“I had no idea it was such a regularly ‘done’ thing. Who is she? Do you mind my asking?”

“She is the daughter of my lawyer’s brother. The two brothers were in business together for some years in Gowerford; but not long ago the younger brother, Henry Heaton, removed to Leyton, as there seemed to be a good opening for him there. He is not a very clever man, and I don’t think he makes much by his profession. His wife has a little money—and there are four daughters.”

“Do they live in Leyton?”

“No, in a house a little way out. It will be Mrs. Heaton’s afternoon at home

to-morrow. She rather affects London manners, and has always an afternoon at home once a week."

"Shows her sense," remarked Ernest.

"Well, I don't know. There are often a lot of people there all at once, or close one after another. I don't like it at all."

"Why don't you go on other days?"

"Because then I'm so awfully afraid of not finding them in. I ride there all the way in horrible suspense, almost dreading to come to the house; then I ring the bell with my heart thumping like a sledge-hammer, then I feel inclined to knock the servant down who tells me 'Mrs. Heaton and the young ladies are out;'; then I ride home, feeling as if the shot of the words had riddled my heart, and I am utterly good for nothing all the rest of the day. No, I have tried it once, and I shan't try it again."

"How did you manage to get engaged to her?" his friend inquired, not unnaturally.

"Well, I had been dreadfully worried by seeing a young fellow of the name of

Graham (his father's a stockbroker in Gowerford) for ever hanging about there; at least, when I say for ever, I mean twice, and I knew he was very intimate with the family, and she seemed rather to like him, and they kept joking together. ('Special arrangement got up by the mother, of course,' thought Ernest, 'done on purpose to bring him to a proposal.') I thought about it till I could bear the suspense no longer, so one afternoon I rode over. I had just come to the last drive-gate, which is very near the house, when I saw her in the garden almost close to me. She had been gathering roses in her little muslin apron, from a bush that almost hung over the sunk fence near the gate, and she jumped up from her knees as she saw me, and stood as if she didn't know whether to go away or to come towards me. I was going to have opened the gate with my whip-handle, but, of course, when I saw her I got off my horse. I didn't want to go up to the house a bit, I didn't want anybody but her. I stammered out, hardly

knowing what I said, 'Were you going through the gate, Miss Heaton?' as if she had anything to go through for. However she said she was going"—("saw her chance at once, clever little girl! and took advantage of it," was Ernest's instant reflection)—"as she wanted to take the roses somewhere—I'm sure I don't know where, and I don't think she did, but I think she saw in my face that I wanted to go no farther—I wanted to speak to her. We went into the plantation, and walked there for ever so long—two hours, I dare say; and long before we came out, she had promised to be my wife, and had told me she loved me."

"So then you rode home happy?"

"Rode home happy! I should rather think so."

"Well, I'm sure, my dear fellow," said Ernest, after a short pause, "I wish you every happiness, with all my heart."

"I'm sure you do."

"You have never told me yet how you got to know her?"

“Oh, when Mr. Henry Heaton lived in Gowerford I met her—saw her at least half a dozen times at her uncle’s. Mr. Heaton has a great rambling old-fashioned house in Castle Street, with a good garden and croquet-lawn behind. She was there playing croquet with her sisters nearly every afternoon, I believe; and I saw her when I rode over with my father, and used to go out and play with them. Then she came with her sister and her uncle to a large dance my mother gave one winter, and I’ve seen her at two or three rehearsals of the Amateur Musical Society in Gowerford.”

“And is that all?”

“No. I have seen her at Leyton, of course.”

“How long have you been engaged, Arthur?”

“Three weeks.”

“Do her mother and father know?”

“No; I told her she might tell her mother, but she didn’t wish to. And I’m glad she didn’t. Mrs. Heaton is so effusive,

and fond of talking, that she would have let it all out one way or another."

"Why don't you let all come out? It would be much more convenient?"

"Because it is so soon after my father's death."

There was a long pause. Rochefort thought his friend had gone to sleep, when the latter suddenly sprang up, saying—

"Well, I've finished my lunch, Arthur, have you?"

"Some time ago," returned the other, laughing; "so now let us do, as you say, 'some good in the world.' Is your gun loaded?"

And the two young sportsmen set off again with their dogs.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER lunch the next day, Longley asked,

“Will you come with me to the Beeches this afternoon, Ernest? I’m going.”

“Is that the name of your paradise?” inquired Mr. Glanville.

“That’s the name. You won’t be long in getting ready, will you?”

“I’ll go as I am, if you like. What have you said to ‘mamma?’”

“My mother’s going some calls,” said Rochefort, as he left the room.

It was an hour’s ride to Leyton—a ride over a smooth, white highway, more or less shaded by overhanging trees, through which the glorious but softened September sun fell in ripples. There were stubble-fields

in plenty on either side the way, and enormous stacks of wheat and hay in the yards adjoining the farm-buildings. On the gabled and ancient homesteads—many of them with black beams supporting the old masonry, and arranged in the picturesque angles we shall soon know nothing of but from pictures—climbed creepers of every description, wearing their first faint tinge of autumnal gold or brown.

Glanville could not imagine how his friend could sufficiently distract, or rather command, his thoughts to “wonder” this, that, or the other, concerning Farmer Smith’s hay, or Farmer Hobson’s wheat crop—to take interest in this large stack, or that set of beasts feeding, and to pull up his horse to watch a hare coursing across a field. At last, however, they reached the Beeches, and walked their horses slowly over the gravel drive, up to the last gate. Round a large Portuguese laurel they saw two young ladies and two young gentlemen playing at croquet in front of the house.

“That’s Graham, with the brown velve-

teen coat. I am glad I've put on my black one," said Rochefort.

"Your *black one* ought to go to the old clothesman," returned Ernest. "There, I've seen them; which of the two is she?"

Rochefort pointed slightly with his whip in the direction of the first hoop, then opened the gate, and they went through.

The young lady designated by her lover's bit of red whipcord was just doing a "front stroke," to get through the second hoop from the stick. She was dressed in white muslin, with an innumerable number of flounces edged with white lace. The transparent body of her dress showed a round white, lovely pair of shoulders. Her only ornament was a little gold locket, set with turquoises, which hung from a thin gold chain round her neck. She had no ribbon about her of any kind. Her fair hair, simply drawn from her temples, was coiled in a mass of plaits behind, one of which was drawn a little forward over the head, to make a sort of coronet. Her face was perfectly lovely, or almost so; its charm

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would probably have been less if it had been moulded by *absolute* rules. Her eyes were of a dark, full blue ; her chin round, soft, and slightly cleft down the middle ; the expression of the mouth, a mixture of archness, innocence, and sweetness ; her hands, which were now clasping the mallet, were exquisitely soft and small.

The young men made their way up to the house (raising their hats to the ladies as they passed), and were introduced into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Heaton sat alone. Longley introduced his friend ; a few remarks—of course, of a thrillingly interesting nature—were exchanged ; and, it being ascertained that Mrs. Heaton had rather a headache, for which they were very sorry indeed, and that it had not been *very* hot riding along, for which Mrs. Heaton was very glad, as they had come so far ; that Mrs. Longley had been persuaded to go out and pay a few calls, which she was perfectly delighted to hear ; that Mr. Heaton was very well, thank you (Rochefort did not know he had asked the ques-

tion, and was perfectly regardless as to the answer)—these, and a few other equally captivating civilities having passed, Mrs. Heaton remarked that she believed the girls and their cousin Theodore were playing at croquet, and Rochefort said—

“ Oh !—are they ? ” as if he and his friend had been afflicted with sudden blindness during their transit from the drive gate to the hall door.

“ I suppose,” said Mrs. Heaton, in a languid sort of way, “ that poor young Mr. Graham finds stockbroking rather dull, or the office unhealthy ; for he generally comes up here on Thursday afternoons, and of course the girls are glad of a fourth hand at croquet, as Theodore only makes a third, you know.”

“ No, I suppose not,” said Rochefort, beginning to look towards the window ; and quite unconscious that he had just assented to the fact of “ Theodore’s ” being only one person, which he had not before doubted.

“ I dare say you would like to join them ; and they can form a game of six,” suggested the lady. The two gentlemen, who had

hitherto been sitting each on a low chair, and each with his hat dangling between his knees, now rose with one accord, and thought they *would* go and join the croquet party. Mrs. Heaton, in a flutter of muslin, ribbons, and smiles rose to accompany them.

They went on to the lawn. Miss Heaton (rather a Jewish looking girl, regular featured, and somewhat stiff), came forward and shook hands with a great deal of propriety. Then Rochefort had the rapture of receiving his little girl's hand in his strong, trembling palm, and of having a few instants' *sotto-voce* conversation with her, while Ernest (after being introduced to her by a brief "my friend Mr. Glanville—Miss Nora Heaton"), very kindly turned his back and talked at random to her sister. While this was going on, "young Mr. Graham" looked fixedly in the direction of the sunk fence bordering the garden, and being joined by Mr. Theodore, expressed his desire that "that fellow Longley had stayed at home, and minded his own business." Mr. Theodore, who had his own surmises, imprudently

suggested that "perhaps he *was* minding his own business by coming here ;" upon which Graham gave him a look calculated to strike a chill into the heart of any youth of seventeen, and Mr. Theodore hastily retired to flatten a path for his ball, in hopes of taking it through the hoop when his turn came.

"We are going to begin again, Mr. Graham," said the silvery voice of Miss Nora ; "and play a game of six."

"Oh, we are, are we ?" said Graham to himself, "then all I hope is, that we shall get on opposite sides, and that I shall be able to knock his ball to perdition every single time he ever gets near a hoop or stick."

Sides were arranged, by somebody mixing all the mallets together, holding them behind his back, and dealing them out at random. Miss Heaton, Mr. Longley and Mr. Graham, *darks* ; Miss Nora, her cousin, and Mr. Glanville, *lights*.

"Look here," said Graham turning very red, and twisting his mallet about ; "I never can play with this mallet. I wish you'd

change with me, Heaton. You take my ball and mallet, and I'll take yours."

"All right," said Theodore. "Do you want to change sides too?"

"Well, I think the darks will be too strong if I don't," returned Graham; and then, remembering he had almost paid his detested enemy a compliment, he added, "Miss Heaton is such a capital player you see."

The game began. During its progress remarks such as the following were sufficiently frequent to pour gall by bowls-full into the heart of the miserable Graham :

"Nora, it's your turn."

"Oh, I *beg* your pardon; I thought it was Lizzie's."

"Mr. Longley!—I've sent your ball inside the Portuguese laurel. *Would* you mind looking for it?"

"Miss Nora, you're being sent all 'over the ground."

"Oh! dear me, am I? Please somebody tell me which hoop I am for?"

"Mr. Longley, *Mr. Longley*, that's *my*

ball please, and don't croquet me. *I'm roving for you !*"

Altogether it was impossible to get concentrated attention from either of them. Mr. Graham had all his own way, and wreaked his vengeance to his heart's content. When he had all but knocked the stick, Rochefort's ball was trying for the second hoop coming home. Some slight gleam of triumph was visible on the unfortunate Graham's face, as he stood watching his adversary's unsuccessful attempts to put, or rather keep, himself in position ; triumph that was soon extinguished however by the perception that all his ill-success did not embarrass Longley in the least. This young gentleman took everything with the most easy coolness ; even when he (Graham) had sent his ball almost to the boundaries of the estate, Rochefort had walked after it at his leisure, and quietly knocked it up again, as if he rather liked that sort of playing than otherwise. Now, he was talking and laughing with both the girls, and had just said in a pleasant, gentlemanly way from the other side of the ground,

“Knocked yourself out, Mr. Graham? Then I shall have a chance now, shan’t I?”

Confound some fellows’ impudence! It was more than any one could stand. He would go, after this game was over. Accordingly, in about half an hour’s time, after making a decent appearance of pretending to care for nobody, and not to care in the least if nobody cared for him, Mr. Graham took his departure.

“I’m so glad he’s gone,” said Nora, as she seated herself on a garden seat, with her lover at only half a yard’s distance from her, and knocked the head of her mallet against the point of her pretty kid boot, while he sat sideways, his arm resting on the back of the seat, his head upon his hand; his eyes riveted on the lovely face so near him; “I’m so glad he’s gone; hasn’t he been cross and disagreeable?”

“Poor fellow!” said her lover; “I should have been, if I had been in his case, I dare say.”

“No, you never could be so disagreeable and so revengeful, and ‘*gauche*.’ And I

don't like him making you look as if you couldn't play."

"I don't care, Nora."

"Because you know you *can* play beautifully. Why didn't you knock *him* about?"

"I thought he had quite enough to put up with as it was. I wouldn't have tormented him more on any account."

"You are very kind."

"We are all kind when we are happy, Nora."

"*Are* you so very happy?" inquired Nora, with a half smile, as she looked down at her boot, and knocked it more severely than ever with her mallet.

"I should be happier if I could ever get a chance of another hour with you in that blessed plantation."

"I couldn't come with you to-day in this dress, Rochefort, if I had ever so many chances," returned his beloved. "I've got to keep it nice for Mrs. Ellershaw's party next week. I only put it on to-day because I knew you would come."

"Thanks, my darling, and you look perfectly lovely in it."

“ Rochefort, who’s your friend ? He’s very handsome.”

“ A college friend of mine. Yes, he’s a good-looking fellow, isn’t he ?”

“ I suppose you’re both going to stay tea ?”

“ If you invite us.”

“ Oh, mamma ’ll be only too glad. I know that much. Let us have another game, Rochefort. I’m afraid of their beginning to look at us, if we sit together any longer.”

“ I won’t be on the opposite side to you again, if we do play. But it is much nicer sitting here.”

“ Yes, but we can be seen from all the windows in the house, and it looks so odd. I will manage that we play on the same side ;” and Miss Nora, who was an enthusiastic disciple of that noble and useful art to which most of the afternoons and evenings in country houses are now, or were then, entirely given up, rose from her seat, and began making arrangements for “ game the third.”

What a delicious game that was ! They were "en famille" now. Miss Heaton took two balls, and devoted her exclusive attention to them, and to her partner, Mr. Glanville, throughout. She was not a bit of a flirt, and seemed in no way over-balanced in mind by Ernest's undeniable charms. Her face and voice changed as little their expression in speaking to him as if he had been her brother. Ernest must have found it insufferably wearisome, but he bore his tedium like a man through all the "burden and heat of the day."

As for Theodore, never did cousin behave better. He looked up to the sky, across the distant fields, into the house, made trial strokes with an odd ball, talked to Mr. Glanville, did anything but notice the lovers, who ought certainly to have presented him with a handsome testimonial when at last they went in to tea.

"Haven't I been a good boy, Nora ?" he whispered over his cousin's shoulder in the hall, when the other gentlemen were out of sight and hearing. "Haven't I left you alone, and done my very best for you ?"

“You have, Theodore; you’ve been a dear good cousin, and I hope you didn’t mind my knocking you out?”

“Oh, not in the least. But look here, Nora, just tell me if it’s all settled? Do, that’s a good girl, and then I’ll always be as good to you as I’ve been to-day.”

“What nonsense, Theodore!”

“It isn’t nonsense. I know it isn’t. Tell me, and I won’t tell a living creature.”

“I don’t believe you could keep a secret for a day.”

“If that isn’t calumny and ingratitude combined! There never was such a trustworthy fellow. Well, you won’t tell me then? but I know I’m right, and I’m very glad; and won’t you look a swell riding in a new landau, with a pair of lovely horses! And mind you get me asked for some shooting next year.”

But Theodore had to make off, laughing as he went, to avoid a box on the ears, which appeared imminent, in return for his congratulatory speech.

After tea there was music. Mrs. Heaton

played (she was rather a dashing, but correct and effective player, and was proud of her accomplishment). Then Nora played, and then Mr. Glanville was asked if he sang. Mr. Glanville was very seldom asked that question.

“I—I am afraid I cannot manage anything without notes,” said he. “I have a wretchedly bad memory.”

None of the Heaton's sang; but upon search being made among a quantity of loose music, there were produced finally, two Christy Minstrel books of Mr. Theodore's, several comic songs, and one “Village Blacksmith,” belonging to the same gentleman; and lastly, a song which had been left, it appeared, by a young lady about six weeks ago, and ought to have been returned every day since, but never had been. It was Kücken's “Ave Maria,” the words from the “Lady of the Lake.” Rochefort threw it across to his friend without comment, and the latter said he should be happy to sing it, if Mrs. Heaton would play for him, and if the ladies liked. The ladies,

of course, would all be delighted. They had never heard it before.

They heard it then. They heard it, in all its pathetic, its thrilling, its passionate harmony, rendered by such a voice as one hears but two or three times in a life—often not that—and such as while memory lasts one never forgets.

The accompaniment upbears the music of that wonderful prayer, as if on mighty wings; it surges like the rush of wind through a forest, and the melody rises from it like notes struck on an Æolian harp.

When the echo of the magnificent music and of the rich, sweet, powerful tenor—a tenor that no woman, and few men, had ever yet heard unmoved—had passed away, there was a silence for a few moments as if it was just after church. The compliments that followed were cut short by Rochefort looking at his watch and then at his friend, and the two said they must go, as Mrs. Longley did not like being left alone all the evening. During the course of the handshaking, and while Mr. Heaton and his

friend were engaged in reciprocating a few remarks on shooting, Rochefort managed to get some hurried words with his little girl. He noticed that her eyes wandered two or three times towards Ernest while he spoke, with a look which he had never yet seen in them—a sort of admiring, astonished, half-wistful look.

“I never heard anything so beautiful as his voice in all my life,” she said to her lover in a sort of half whisper.

“You have never been to any concerts, you see, yet, Nora.”

“Yes, I have,” she returned quickly, “to concerts in the Town Hall.”

“Ah, yes, of course. But that’s not exactly what I mean. Good-bye, my darling, we must go now.”

And then followed the mutual lingering pressure of two hands that were loath to part (for the child loved him as well as she knew how to love then; and, besides, he was her lover, and engaged to her, and that was a sweet and a proud thing), the meeting of eyes that said what they could

(other modes of speech being impossible), and then they parted. A few minutes after, the young men were on their road home.

“Confound me, if I could stand that kind of thing,” began Ernest, almost as soon as they were off. “I wouldn’t be engaged at any price, on those terms.”

“What do you think of her?” inquired Longley, after a time.

“Think?—That she is a little beauty, but one of the last sort of girls I should have imagined you would have chosen.”

“Aren’t you afraid of my knocking you off your horse?” said Rochefort, a little fiercely.

“Not in the least. You asked me what I thought, and I am telling you the truth. Besides,” added Ernest, on second thoughts, “why should you imagine I meant anything uncomplimentary?”

Rochefort was silenced for a moment. Why indeed *had* he thought so?

“Never mind,” pursued Glanville, in his usual light easy tone, “let us talk of something else. It is impossible for a fellow to

judge of a girl by seeing her for only half an afternoon, and not that in fact, for I scarcely exchanged a dozen words with her. I only meant by what I said, that I should fancy her a little fond of society and—a—" (admiration he was going to have said, but recalled the word in time), "and that sort of thing, and you are what I should call a *solid* sort of fellow, fond of work and reading, and so on."

"And so," said Rochefort, briefly, "you imagined I should like a blue stocking for a wife? The fact is, you don't *know* her, you see; she is just one of those girls who *are capable of anything*."

Ernest waited a moment to hear if anything else were coming, and then said,

"Ah—exactly. . . . I understand."

The subject was then changed and not referred to again during their ride home.

That night, when Mr. Glanville found himself alone in his room, he disposed of his six feet of elegant height in a long low Indian lounging chair, lighted a cigar, donned his blue velvet smoking cap, thrust

a hand into each pocket, and pursued his reflections thus—

“That poor fellow’s going to make himself a miserable man for life. She is a girl that would have done well enough for a fellow like me, but she’s not after his sort in the least. . . . What a little beauty she is! What a lovely, rounded, perfect neck and shoulders; what bewildering eyes, so dark and blue and tender; what beautiful hands; what masses of hair (I wonder if it is all hers); and with what grace she moved about in that long white dress! . . . How that gold chain and locket glistened upon her lovely breast as she laughed, looking up into Rochefort’s face, or when she pretended to be out of breath after one or two hard strokes. . . . And those distracting little boots! . . .

“But what did she say? What mind or heart has she? When her father came home, and things were spoken of in which Arthur had interest—great, even deep interest—did she listen? Did her eyes show any intelligence? She stooped down, and

stroked and patted that hateful little terrier they are so fond of, and talked nonsense to it. Once or twice, Longley turned and looked towards her, with that searching, tender look of his—a shade anxious, I thought, but wholly devoted; and she did not see him or return his look. He was then in another world from hers. *Did he not see that?*

“Is she capable of deep love? Could any other man win more flashes from those beautiful eyes, or a more eager pressure from those soft fingers? Her eyes responded kindly, but never fervently, never with sudden brightness, to his And he is one of the greatest ‘catches’ in England! Can it really be ‘*au sérieux*’ with him?

“Her playing showed me as much as anything what she was. It was not bad playing; but there was nothing in it. She touched the notes prettily, gently; she made no blunders, but . . . Good heavens! *What I have heard made* out of that air of Blumenthal’s, and how utterly she missed

the meaning! Arthur can be as much moved—as much impressed by real music as any fellow I know; and as a rule is intolerant of bad performance; but he stood against that wall as if in a dream of happiness while she played, turning the pages for her as if the very paper was a sacred thing to him. Apparently, a sign from her eyelashes told him when to turn—I saw nothing else.

“What was it I heard her saying to him? ‘What a beautiful voice your friend has!’ It seems, then, she *can* understand music in some forms.

“Shall I see her again before she is married? I don’t care to—I don’t wish to, she is nothing to me. It is always best not to see too much of a very lovely woman, who is engaged to a man one doesn’t believe she cares for Will she *ever* care for him? Will he care much for her, after they have been married a year?”—Arrived at this point, Mr. Glanville rose slowly from his chair, took a turn or two in his room, considered himself for a few minutes in the

glass, and then, whistling carelessly, began to prepare himself for bed.

Ernest stayed about a month at Riverswood. A little incident occurred the night before he left which each of the friends afterwards remembered well, though at the time it had only a momentary and passing effect on them. They were sitting together after dinner, before a large, bright fire, for the evenings had then become cold ; and were especially so in the large dining-room, which was little occupied during the day. They had been talking of college affairs and college friends ; of Ernest's future plans, (as far as he had any plans ;) and about Nora—of whom they now seldom spoke. Mr. Glanville had satisfied his friend, by declaring that she ‘certainly improved infinitely upon acquaintance,’ and that she seemed to him to become more charming and more womanly every time he saw her.

“She is gaining so much more expression ; she is so much more conversational than I had thought she could be,” he would say,

“you will be the envied of every man in London, when you bring her up, Arthur.”

It was quite certain that Ernest had done much to bring her out, with his easy, pleasant talk, always of a sort that she could enter into and appreciate ;—by his singing, for which she had such wondering admiration, and later, by his simple presence, which, by drawing off attention to himself in the circle at the Beeches, made her far less restrained than formerly in her manner towards her lover.

It was now tacitly understood that there was an engagement ; but Rochefort was firm in his refusal to have it known until he had told his mother, and he would tell his mother at the beginning of the new year. Resolutely and heroically he denied himself the unspeakable bliss of having the right to walk with her where he liked, or to sit with her in “her father’s study,” secure from interruption.

“My mother shall not hear that I have chosen my wife through servants or strangers,” he said to Ernest one day, “before she hears it from my own lips.”

On the evening of which we write, the two friends talked long together over that bright fire, and neither seemed willing to make the move into the drawing-room which would be the ending-up of their month's close companionship, and (on one side at least), of a month's frank confidence.

"Well, you will come and be my groomsman?" said Rochefort at last.

"Certainly, old fellow; of course I will—not that you've ever told me when it is to come off."

"O, I'll let you know in good time. Well, will you take one more glass of the old port, and then we'll go to my mother's?"

He pushed the decanter towards his friend, and then, just before he drank, said carelessly—

"Here's to our *last* meeting, then!"

"Our *what*?" exclaimed Glanville, with a look of such sudden horror, that Rochefort stopped, with the wine at his lips, and stared at him.

"What did I say? Oh—ah—of course; I said *last*, didn't I, instead of *next*? It

was only a mistake ; why do you look so strange ?”

“ Here—stop—don’t drink it !” exclaimed Ernest, starting up, his face almost white ; “ give me that glass, Arthur.”

“ Is the fellow gone mad ?” was all Rochefort said. As he held the glass away from him, Ernest grasped it with his hand ; half the wine was spilled between them ; the other half, with the glass, Glanville threw upon the fire. “ And now, what’s that for, if it will please you to explain ?” demanded his host. “ You’re surely not more superstitious than any old crony in the village ?”

But Glanville would say no more.

“ Let us go into the drawing-room,” he said at last, after he had taken a few silent turns in the room, “ and play a game of chess. I believe I have a fit of the blues to-night.”

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. LONGLEY had a half-sister younger than herself, who was married to a certain Viscount Belton, and who lived somewhere in Belgravia. They were both daughters of a London banker, now deceased, who had left them large fortunes. They had had one brother, the son of the first wife, who, having nothing else to do, wore himself to death with dissipation and drinking at the age of nine-and-twenty. In spite of all his faults, the sisters loved and mourned him; and Mrs. Longley called her only son after him, and after the name of her mother's family.

Lady Belton had an only son, too, now a boy of four years old; but she had also

five daughters. The eldest had managed to such perfection her first two seasons, that she was already engaged to be married. Her lover was a rising barrister of about forty, very well connected, and of unexceptionable manners and character. Minnie (Erminia was her full name) was not violently fond of him, and had even been seen in tears on the day of her engagement; but Mr. Templeton was well known to be the sole heir, and the sole darling, of an aged and wealthy godmother. His sister had married an "Hon.," and his father was a Dean. There was, therefore, no help for it; in fact, no way out of it. Minnie was one of five daughters, and not exactly a beauty; and she must, therefore, take him and "be thankful!"

As for Clara, it had been arranged in Lady Belton's own mind, ever since she was in long-clothes, that she was to marry her half-cousin at Riverswood. She had given one or two hints on the subject already to her sister; and Mrs. Longley was not averse to the idea, though she could not be said to

be strongly favourable to it. She knew Erminia's girls were not pretty; she had not seen Clara since she was fourteen, and *then* her hair was not only "golden," it was almost red. That wouldn't, of course, matter so much now, because light hair was the fashion, and Clara's could be easily powdered and done up, to make it appear the thing. But then, why need Rochefort marry a plain little girl with freckles (she had had freckles at fourteen) and dubious-coloured hair? Mrs. Longley thought a great deal of her son, and did not see why he should not look out for himself at leisure during the next five or ten years, and then marry exactly whom he pleased—which meant, the woman *she* should be pleased to approve of for him. Of course, Lady Belton looked at things in a different light, and was prepared to move heaven and earth, when the proper time and opportunity came, for bringing about this desirable match for her daughter. She had fully determined to bring Clara out next spring, and to persuade—nay, force—her sister to come up

to town for at least a couple of months. Then, everything possible was to be done to make his aunt's house attractive to the young man; his tastes, his fancies, should be consulted, as far as it lay in woman's power to consult them; and a great deal lay in Lady Belton's power, as, perhaps, Mr. Templeton could have vouched for, if he had been asked. Clara should be dressed to perfection; her undoubted musical talents brought into play; even her hair should be so arranged as to be only another arrow into the heart of her susceptible cousin; delicate and passing hints as to her sweetness of disposition should be deftly thrown out in her absence by her devoted mother; dinners should be given for him, balls arranged, trips to flower-shows and on the water should be planned to suit his convenience—but we stop, afraid of wearying our readers' patience by the bare summary of the long, the ceaseless fatigues, the sleepless cares, the self-denying and persistent labour, which a lady of refinement, of sense, and of good feeling was not only willing, but *anxious*, to go

through for the sake of establishing her daughter as mistress of ten thousand a year.

One morning about the beginning of December, Lady Belton sat at her breakfast table, leisurely opening her letters one after another.

“Here is one from Emily,” she said to her husband, who was looking over the *Times*; “I wonder what has induced *her* to write?”

“Does she never write to you then?” inquired Lord Belton.

“Hardly ever; she is a wretched correspondent.—What *fearfully* deep black! I really don’t think it’s right of people to use such deep borders. It always gives one the feeling that they are writing to say a whole family has gone off!”

“And in this instance it is to be devoutly hoped that is *not* the case,” remarked Lord Belton, turning a page of his *Times*.

His wife opened and read:—

“MY DEAREST ERMINIA,

“I am afraid I have been a long while in answering your last kind letter, but I

have been equal to very little exertion, ever since my terrible loss. Latterly I have been suffering from almost constant head-ache, and the whole of this week I have been very ill, and more upset than it is possible for me to tell you. I must try, however, and write as connectedly as possible—*far* as I am from feeling connectedly—for it is necessary that I should tell you *everything*.” —(Here Lady Belton became extremely faint, and could with difficulty control herself to read to the end of the letter with a decent appearance of calm.)—“I have for some time been very uneasy about the number of times Rochefort rode out, without choosing afterwards to give me any particular account as to where he went—and I often thought it was to call on a family of the name of Heaton—the father is a brother of our lawyer). This Mr. Heaton has several daughters, two grown-up, and I had heard that *one was a great beauty*; in fact, I have seen her once or twice, and I must say she is very pretty. Rochefort never would confess anything to me; but at last I became

so miserable, that one evening I told him I had rather be dead than feel that he kept secrets from me, and I was sure he had a secret, and wouldn't he tell me what it was? So then he told me everything; and said he would never have kept it from me for a day, if it hadn't been so soon after his father's death, and that he had not let any one know. Nora (that is her name), had not even told her mother; and for my sake he had denied himself *in every way*; had scarcely ever seen her alone, or anything of that kind; and wouldn't have engaged himself when he did, but that he fancied another young fellow was about there a good deal, and might be making her an offer.—Just fancy my feelings!—I can hardly bear to write all this; it seems so *lowering*; as if *my son* had any cause to fear his not being accepted by a girl in *that position*, or (if you will excuse my saying so) in almost any other. Of course I was *dreadfully* upset when I heard about it, and I am afraid said some very hard things to him. Naturally, I have done *all in my power* to persuade

him to break it off, but he won't hear of such a thing. He sees it makes me so wretched to suspect he has gone to Leyton, that I believe he doesn't go at all; but of course he writes—at least *I suppose so*, and that is quite as bad *if not worse*. The girl will not have a sixpence; but I should not care so much for that, if she had family and connections. The father of these two Mr. Heatons was actually a *tanner*; and when I asked Rochefort of what family Mrs. Henry Heaton was, he said she came from London, and that he really didn't know what her father had been. But I noticed he turned rather red as he said so, and I shouldn't at all wonder if he was a shop-keeper or something; for I think Mrs. Henry Heaton a fast sort of woman—and I should think she would have spoken of her family now and then, if it was anything. The Mr. Heatons, I must say, *are* gentlemen, though how they came to be so I cannot say, under the circumstances.

“The thing I am particularly writing to you about is, to beg you and Everard and

the two girls *to come down and spend two or three weeks here at Christmas*. I want, if possible, to distract Rochefort a little from this foolish and unfortunate idea of his ; and I am also in sad want of a little cheering up and enlivening myself, for this affair has made me quite ill. You must not refuse me ; our *last* chance is becoming smaller every hour of inducing my son to marry suitably and creditably ; and you may depend on me now, for using every effort that is in a *mother's power* to prevent the calamity I fear, and to bring about a union more in accordance with his means and position.—I am always your very affectionate sister,

“ EMILY LONGLEY.

“ P.S.—Remember that I can *promise nothing*. Sometimes I even dare not *hope* anything. You know how *resolute* Rochefort is at times, like his father, only worse ! Still we can but do our best.”

When Lady Belton finished the letter, she folded it up, put it in her pocket, and

remained absolutely silent for the rest of breakfast. The girls saw that something was wrong, and retired as soon as they could to their own sitting room—not finding anything entertaining in munching toast and butter, while mamma remained absorbed in (apparently) very unpleasant thought and eat nothing, and papa turned and returned his paper with unusual persistence, but making no remark whatever, and looking neither to the right hand nor to the left.

“*There!*” said Lady Belton, producing the letter, and throwing it across to her husband the moment her daughters had left the room; “it’s all over.”

“What’s all over?—Rochefort isn’t dead I hope?”

“Dead! of course not; how can you be so absurd, Everard?”

“Is he engaged?”

“You can take the letter and read it for yourself.” Her husband laid down his newspaper and took up Mrs. Longley’s highly-scented and blackly-bordered sheets. He read them leisurely all through.

"I always told you, Minnie, that you were making a great deal too sure of this business. I warned you not to set your heart on it."

"It is very easy to say that, Everard. Perhaps it would have been as well if *you* had exerted yourself a little more to bring it about, instead of sitting down coolly to watch things take their course."

"What did you want me to do? Ask Longley to come and stay a month in the house; or write a civil note, inquiring whether he had any objection to Clara for a wife?"

Lady Belton vouchsafed no reply to these singular queries. After a time, however, she spoke again, as follows :

"I suppose you have no objection to going down there at Christmas?"

"None whatever," said his lordship, getting up and placing himself on the rug with his back to the fire; "the game's too good a one to throw up without a struggle. But I have a presentiment that you'll lose it, Minnie."

“Well, I don’t know,” returned the lady.

“One thing I can tell you, that you’ll have to arrange your tactics very cautiously, to have the ghost of a chance. He is rather an impatient sort of fellow, and if he should once scent what you are up to——” Lord Belton left his sentence unfinished.

“But you liked him, Everard, when you were there last year, didn’t you?”

“*Liked him?* Oh, that’s another thing; yes, of course, I *liked* him. A fellow’s not the worse for having spirit.”

“I shouldn’t want him for my son-in-law, if he hadn’t any.”

“Only in this instance we might dispense with it for a time, and then tack it on afterwards, when he *became* the son-in-law,” suggested Lord Belton, half laughing.

“From all you told me of him,” pursued his wife, not appearing to heed that last remark, “I thought he would be so *entirely* what I should like and approve of for dear Clara.”

Lord Belton almost roared.

“*Like and approve of for Clara!* I

should rather think you would. May you get him! Why, I don't suppose there are half a dozen such matches in England—considering everything—if there are that. I don't say he has no faults; he may have a hundred that I know nothing of, but I know that I would give a great deal if he would take the happiness of any one of my daughters into his keeping Talk of '*approving* of him for Clara,' " concluded his lordship, after several moments pause, "my only fear is that you will never be in the least called upon to say whether you approve of him for her or not!"

"You only make me more and more miserable, Everard, that she should have lost such an opportunity. What a *horrid* girl that Dora, or whatever you call her, must be. *You may be sure* that she or her mother, or both, have done everything that was *in their power* to entrap him!"

"Which would be the first instance on record—in good society—of any one having done such a thing, of course," answered his lordship. "Well, Minnie, I'm off. Put

it all out of your head, if you can, and write quietly to Emily, and tell her we will come. Say as little else as you can."

The letter was written, and the invitation accepted.

CHAPTER VII.

It had always been the custom at Riverswood to give a dinner on Christmas Eve to the men who were employed on the immediate estate. They were accompanied by their wives; and the children—it was supposed—were left at home in the charge of grandmothers, aunts, or elder sisters. When Rochefort was a little fellow, with a child's yearning for playfellows of any kind or description, he had begged his father almost piteously to "let the little boys that he saw playing at marbles in the road" come with their parents on these occasions, that they might have a game at "blind man's buff" after dinner. But Mr. Longley, who was not fond of children, and

who always sternly forbade his son's exchanging a word with the village children, informed him that it would not be suitable for him—as a gentleman—to play blind man's buff with little boys whose ordinary vocation was playing marbles on the road. Rochefort puzzled his head sadly over this and other similar prohibitions, and had even been found crying because he might not make dirt pies, or run in puddles in the poultry-yard, to imitate other youngsters.

However, that was all past now ; and for many years the young master had spoken to whom he liked, and been where he liked, and was a happier and a better man for it.

About three days before the Christmas Eve dinner this year, it suddenly struck Rochefort that now he could do as he liked he would have all the children at it, and give them a treat of some sort. He propounded this idea one morning when he was out riding with his cousins. Minnie laughed at it, and said she thought it would be very troublesome, but Clara affirmed it would be

fun, and asked him what he would do to amuse them.

“I don’t know. Can you suggest anything?”

“Yes, have a Christmas tree, and Minnie and I will dress it for you,” returned Miss Clara, after a little reflection.

“But is there time to get up a Christmas tree?” asked her cousin.

“Oh yes, plenty of time. Make one of your men dig us up a pretty little fir tree, and take us to Gowerford to get things to hang on it, and you will see if we won’t get up something the children will remember for years!”

“I shall certainly remember it if they don’t,” said Rochefort, looking round on his cousin with considerable admiration. “You shall have carte blanche, Clara, to do and try anything you like. Will you have the money now, and ride over to Gowerford before dinner?” he added, laughing.

“No, let us go to-morrow in the carriage, and bring the things home with us,” said practical Clara. “Are you going hunting

to-morrow though?" she inquired, with a slight fall in her face and voice, as she turned towards her cousin.

"No, not to-morrow. There will be no more hunting now before Christmas. Let us have the carriage then, and go to-morrow."

"That's right, and now we may have a canter along this piece of road, mayn't we?"

Clara looked very well riding. Her auburn hair fell in a mass of curls down her back; her bright, intelligent face was flushed with healthy exercise; she sat firm and upright on her saddle, and held her reins with a strong, resolute little hand. She had a dark blue habit made in the last fashion just before coming up, and fitting perfectly; her hat was of dark blue felt to match, with a blue feather. This outfit had been the object of her mother's special attention, who had not been known to be so particular about the fit of any one single garment of woman's wear since she had tried on her wedding dress one and twenty years ago.

“ You are going to invite a *lot of children*, Rochefort, and have a *Christmas Tree !*” exclaimed his mother at dinner, when she was told of the plan. “ I think you are going out of your senses.”

“ Why not amuse the poor little brats when one can, mamma ?” returned her son ; “ besides, it will be ‘ fun,’ as Clara says, ‘ buying the things.’ ”

“ Oh ; is Clara going to help you ?” inquired Mrs. Longley, suddenly very much mollified, and thinking it might not be such a bad plan after all.

“ Yes, we’re going to Gowerford tomorrow, to buy the things. Aunt Minnie, you will come with us, won’t you ?”

“ Aunt Minnie” would have gone to Japan to chaperone him and the girls, provided no other young women were to be of the company : it was, therefore, with no great hesitation that she consented to be taken on an easy drive of eight miles with them.

“ Are you going to have all the babies ?” inquired Mrs. Longley. “ I am prepared for anything now.”

“ Oh, the babies—I had forgotten all about them. They can be left with some one, can’t they, and only the elder children come ?”

“ I should speak to the workhouse authorities, if I were you, Rochefort,” said Lord Belton, “ and see if they can’t arrange to establish a *crèche* for the occasion, with two or three old women to manage it ; or else I would offer *beds* to the whole population for the night !”

“ It’s too bad of you, papa,” said Clara, colouring up ; “ you laugh at everything, you always do. I don’t wonder most people are afraid of doing kind things, for there are so many other people to ridicule them !”

It was rather too strong a speech for the occasion ; but Clara was very young and very natural.

Lord Belton looked up from his plate and surveyed her with some astonishment and an amused smile. Rochefort did the same for a moment, but then said,

“ Thank you, Clara ; I see you are a firm ally of mine. We will buy the dolls and

trumpets in spite of them all, and no one need see our tree that doesn't like."

Every one round the table was better pleased before this speech than after. It was too frank, too easy; it had too much the tone of simple good-fellowship in it, to please those who were anxiously desirous to establish a different tone of feeling between the cousins.

Lady Belton—to do her justice—was behaving admirably. She had seen the sort of ground she was on very soon after coming into the house; and she had concluded it best, after maturely considering the subject, *to do nothing* but sit quietly down, and watch vigilantly, and await her chance if it ever came. This course she would try, she thought, for a fortnight: if nothing seemed to come of it she might be compelled to use stronger measures.

Poor little Clara's outspoken champion-ship of her cousin upon several occasions, made her mother feel, however, that a few words on the subject of a little more *reserve* in manner were become quite necessary, and

she thus approached the subject about eleven o'clock that night in her daughter's bed-room.

"Clara—I was very glad you had promised to help your cousin Rochefort about this Christmas tree. If there is any season when we ought to think a little of others, and try to give them pleasure—as well as taking it ourselves—it is this. A Christmas of selfishness is always badly spent."

This speech was received by Clara in silence. She only blushed, and went on combing out her hair before the glass.

"At the same time I am sure, my dear Clara, you will not mind my telling you that perhaps it would be better when your papa makes one of his absurd speeches, not to take it *quite* so much *au sérieux*, and leave your cousin to defend himself, if he cares to do it."

Clara blushed redder than ever, and dragged at her poor hair unmercifully.

"Stop, stop, my child ! you will not have a hair left in five minutes. I shall have to call in Eugénie, and I especially want to

keep her away till I have done speaking to you. Here, let me do your hair—where's the brush?"

"*You* do it mamma?" exclaimed Clara, looking round in astonishment.

"I don't want you to imagine," continued Lady Belton, not answering her, but brushing away vigorously, "that you have done anything wrong, or that I would have you like your cousin any less; but, in fact, you are old enough to understand what I mean, Clara; just be a little, a very little more *retenue* in your manner, and you will please me entirely." And then she kissed her daughter.

"I am sure you need not bother yourself, mamma dear, about the little things I say," said Clara, returning her mother's kiss, "for you know as Rochefort is engaged, he is not likely to pay much attention to me, and cannot possibly misunderstand my meaning in anything." And having got through this little speech with some effort, Clara, turned away, and busied herself again with her hair.

Lady Belton became very serious.

“But, as I have told you, Clara, this engagement of his is thought to be a very *foolish* and a very *unsuitable* thing. He is probably preparing great unhappiness for himself; and all his truest friends are anxious that it should be broken off, and made a thing of the past.”

Clara, who must of course have been an idiot to have had no inkling whatever, since she came to Riverswood, of what was the part assigned to her in this little plot to break off her cousin's engagement, was yet far too honest and good to have any wish to undertake that part; in fact, it was one entirely above her capacities, and she had behaved to her cousin merely with the frankness and good-nature that was natural to her. Whether any feeling a little stronger than cousinly friendship was beginning to take possession of her heart, is a thing neither here nor there; for if she had loved him to desperation, she would never have tried to win him from the woman to whom he had given his faith. No; Lady Belton

knew perfectly well, that her only chance lay in the possibility of Rochefort himself becoming interested in his cousin ; in his being attracted by her girlish and cousinly liking ; influenced by constant companionship with her, gradually and almost unconsciously weaned from the possession of one absorbing idea ; until at last it might be possible for his mother so to work on his better feelings as to persuade him to seize the happiness which was held before him ; and heroically to cast away that false vision of the same which lay behind !

To achieve all this, however, Clara must be zealously guarded from every false step. She must also be shown gently and warily how far she might step without incurring animadversion, with the hope even of exciting gratitude and praise if she stepped successfully and well.

“ All his truest friends are anxious that it should be broken off, and made a thing of the past.” Lady Belton had said, referring to the absorbing point at issue.

“ I cannot see how he can break off an

engagement," returned Clara, stoutly ; " it would be very wrong and dishonourable, unless anything made it absolutely necessary."

" But, supposing, my dear Clara, that it were believed by all who know him best, and *her* best" (Lady Belton concealed the fact that nothing whatever was known of Nora by any member of the family), " that his marriage is likely to be an unhappy one in consequence of the difference in their positions, and—a—so on ; then does it not become a kindness to wish such a tie broken, before it be cemented for ever ?" Clara had never in her life been honoured by such highly finished discourse on her mother's part, and was no little astounded by it. She held her own, however, in spite of it.

" I suppose he must have known what he was about, though, mamma, when he engaged himself ; and perhaps Aunt Emily thinks less of her than she deserves. I am sure I hope he will be happy ; I should be very sorry to think he wouldn't."

Lady Belton looked rather hard at her daughter for a minute. Then she said—

“You see, Clara, young men are often the very worst judges of what would be best for them in the way of marriage. They often engage themselves on the impulse of the moment.”

“But I don’t think my cousin appears foolish at all, mamma.”

“I am sure I do not think so. I have a very high opinion of him; but people are sometimes drawn into these things, and are taken at an advantage.” Then at last Clara turned round and looked frightened.

“Do you mean to say that any one was so mercenary and wicked as to be capable of that, mamma? How I should hate any one that was!”

“Hush, hush, Clara; now, you are too vehement again. I did not actually say that anyone had done it, but your aunt strongly suspects that there must have been a great deal of influence at work to make your cousin do anything so rash and unthinking And now my child,” added Lady Belton, “we will not talk any more to-night; in fact, I hardly know what has

made me say so much on this unpleasant subject, except that it is so very much in all our minds at present. Sleep well, and dream of all the gorgeous things you are going to buy for this famous tree of yours." And smiling sweetly, Lady Belton bestowed a final kiss on her daughter's blooming cheek, and took her departure.

"She is more than half in love with her cousin," she said to her husband that night; "and I almost think might make some slight impression, only that she is so very open with him.—If I had only had time to form her a little before bringing her!"

The next morning the carriage was ordered round in good time to take the party to Gowerford.

"Don't drive, Rochefort," his mother said to him in an under tone; "it looks unsocial."

"Oh, mother! I can't sit in the midst of three ladies and talk rubbish for sixteen miles!" said her son. Mrs. Longley frowned.

"You must not get into the way of

talking in that manner of ladies' society, Rochefort. I hope you don't really feel so."

"I should be perfectly delighted to drive Clara there in the dog-cart with no one else," said he; "but three ladies is another thing."

His mother's heart suddenly began to beat with such violent precipitation that she could stand no longer, and had to take a seat.

"My dear Rochefort, if you only knew how happy I am to hear you say so!"

"My dear mamma; I am delighted to have afforded you happiness for a moment—but we really must be off."

"Well, I won't keep you now then. We will have a little talk another time."

"A little talk! What on earth does my mother mean?" thought Rochefort, as he mounted the box-seat and gathered up the reins.

Arrived at Gowerford, Lady Belton informed her nephew that she wanted Minnie's assistance in choosing a shawl (N.B.—

she had only brought six with her, besides mantles and rugs), and would he mind taking Clara with him to buy the toys, as this would save time? They could meet again in the waiting-room at the "Castle." Rochefort, of course, was perfectly willing, and he and Clara set off together in capital spirits.

"How many are we to buy for, Rochefort?" inquired that young lady; "we ought to know that."

"Of course we ought," said he stopping short for an instant in the street; "and I hav'n't the least idea."

"Not the least idea? What *are* we to do?"

"Oh never mind, let us buy a good lot."

"But, Rochefort—we must try and make some sort of calculation. You help me. Tell me how many families will be there?" Having at last arrived at some approach to an estimate on this important point, it became a question what they should buy.

"Oh, I don't know. Bats and balls," suggested Rochefort. Clara further pro-

posed dolls, carts, whips, and wooden horses.

“You are a first-rate *aide-de-camp*,” said her cousin with hearty admiration; “I should have made a fearful business of it alone. In fact I could not have attempted it. Now for the dolls—I never bought a doll in my life.”

Perhaps neither of the cousins had ever more thoroughly enjoyed themselves in their lives than they did in the succeeding two hours. Of course they were cheated outrageously, and charged just what it occurred to the shop people to ask; but they were perfectly contented, and thought the toys remarkably cheap. They then proceeded to pay a heavy tax for the privilege of selecting bags of bonbons and various Christmas-tree adornments of no ultimate use on this earth; they favoured similarly the vendors of oranges, crystalized fruits and wax tapers; and finally returned to the “Castle” brimfull of pride in their purchases, and evidently on the best possible terms with each other.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE was, of course, rather a warm day, with the sky grey, and the roads slushy. The young master started down the long drive through the park, about twelve o'clock in the morning, equipped in the velveteen coat that Mr. Glanville would have given, six months before, to the old clothes' man, and wearing a pair of black leather gaiters which had also seen considerable service. He strode on, his inseparable dogs bounding and barking beside him, till he came to the lodge, where, seeing Mary Rudge looking through the latticed window, he lifted his hat an inch or two from his head in mock ceremony, and gave a smile that brought her to the door in an instant.

The two dogs remained outside. Mary would have let reasonably tame wolves into her cottage, provided her foster-son brought and accompanied them but Rochefort said,

“No, no, their feet are all wet ; they will dirty everything ; let them stay outside.”

He shut the door behind him, and then took his little foster mother straight into his arms, and kissed her once, twice, three times.

“Many happy returns of it, Mamie, and may you look as bonny for the next ten at least, as you do now.”

“And may you look as—as handsome and as well, for the next fifty, Mr. Rochefort,” returned Mary, wiping her eyes as she always did on these occasions, and then looking fondly and proudly at the strong, erect young figure, and the fine dark face before her ; “and if there is anything else on earth I can wish you, and of course there are a lot of things, you know I do it.”

“I am sure you do. I shall doubt everything before I doubt that. Well, Steph, and how’s the rheumatism?”

"Pretty bad, thank you, sir. I don't suppose I shall ever get much the better of that now."

"Oh yes, you will. By-the-bye," said Rochefort, feeling, as he spoke, in all his pockets, "I intended to bring you home something for it from Gowerford, but I'm afraid I forgot it. Something old Davison told me of. I'll remember it next time, and meanwhile, Mamie, here's something for you if you like it."

He threw a small parcel across the table towards her, and then watched her face as she unfolded the wrappers, and brought to view a lovely little "Lady's Companion," in crimson morocco, lined with crimson velvet, and fitted with scizzors, pen-knife, stiletto, silver thimble, needle-case, little mirror, and so on.

"I don't know whether it's the sort of thing," said Rochefort, half apologetically ; "but I suppose women always want scizzors and thimbles, and that sort of thing. My cousin helped me to choose it."

"You know it's a great deal too good for

me," returned Mrs. Rudge, holding it out in every possible light. "It's perfectly lovely. And you know I've told you over and over again, Mr. Rochefort, not to buy me anything more, for I've got everything—havn't I, Steph; and this is ever so much too good!"

"Too good!" repeated Rochefort, bending his head so as almost to touch that of his little foster-mother—he was very fond of her—"use all the things up as quick as you can, that I may buy you some more."

Mary had married Stephen Rudge when she was nineteen, and when he was a hale, strong fellow of forty. Rheumatism had made an old man of him at fifty, but his wife had retained all the bloom, plumpness, and activity of her first youth. She had had two sons, and lost them both, as infants. When Rochefort was born, a nurse was, of course, wanted for him at once, and Mary Rudge, who then lived in the village, was persuaded by the united entreaties of doctor and father, and by the offer of remuneration that appeared to her something royal,

to leave her own baby, then a month old, in the care of her married sister (who had already four of her own), and to go up to Riverswood to nurse the young heir.

The young heir throve to the satisfaction and delight of everybody ; but his poor little foster brother died after a few days' illness, when he had only numbered sixteen weeks of somewhat troubled life. Mary's grief was so violent that Rochefort's life was next endangered :—then reigned Terror indeed!

Mrs. Longley went almost out of her senses, and prayed the poor woman almost on her bended knees to control herself for the sake of the precious life which hung upon hers. Mr. Longley promised her double the large amount which had been intended to recompense her for bringing up an heir to Riverswood. The doctor reasoned with and scolded her, and told her how certain she was to have half a dozen more babies, every one of which he felt morally convinced would live to survive her ; and finally, Mary's own sense of duty and feeling of affection for the little fellow

to whom she had been as a mother from his birth prevailed ; she controlled her grief, literally forcing her spirits back to their old tone, and tried to forget, or, at any rate, not to dwell upon, her sorrow. In return, she was afforded every pleasure and variety that an anxious father or mother could devise, and she and Rochefort bloomed and smiled again.

From this time a passionate and jealous love for her young charge took possession of the young foster-mother's heart. She could hardly bear to see any one else fit a shoe on for him, lay him in his laced and be-ribboned cot, or play bo-peep with him behind a handkerchief. She had been found crying, because, as she was a married woman, she could not stay and be his nurse as long as he wanted one. She did stay as long as she or Mrs. Longley could devise the shadow of an excuse for her so doing. And then the separation was terrible. For nights afterwards the poor woman would wake moaning and sobbing from her sleep, and calling for her boy. Her life, for many

months afterwards, seemed to hold no joy for her. She never had any of those children the doctor had so confidently promised her ; and she continued to love the life for which her own, and her last baby's, had been sacrificed, with a devotion before which every other feeling of her heart shrank to insignificance.

While we have been making this digression ; Rochefort was sitting in Mary's kitchen on the opposite side of the hearth to her old husband, employing himself in making the great black cat stand on her hind legs.

" Mr. Rochefort," said Mary, who had put by her present carefully, and was now stitching away busily by the window, " did you say your cousin had helped you to choose that pretty case for me ?"

" Yes," said the master, looking up ; " one of my cousins, who is now at the Hall."

" Her as I always see riding next to you when you come down the drive, and when I open the gate for you ?"

" That is the lady," he returned.

Mary gave a very rapid stealthy side-

glance at him from the corners of her eyes, and went on with her stitching.

“They are very grand, nice young ladies, aren’t they, Mr. Rochefort?”

“I like them very much. We are very good friends. Look—look at this cat, Mamie!”

A little pause; then—

“Mr. Rochefort?”

“Mrs. Rudge?”

“I suppose you’ll be thinking of getting married some time, shan’t you?” And the work went on faster than ever; so fast that Mary did not in the least see what she was doing. The young master coloured to the roots of his hair, and then laughed.

“If they’ll let me, Mary. You see there are so many difficulties in the right path—always.”

“*Difficulties!*” repeated Mrs. Rudge, with a strong accent of indignation. “Who’s to make difficulties for *you*, I should like to know? Who’s to do as they like, if you can’t?”

“Ah, that’s just it, Mamie; if I could

do what I *liked*, it would be all easy sailing."

"And who's to prevent you doing what you like?" inquired his foster-mother, firing up again.

"There are different ideas in this world as to what is right and what isn't," returned he, with a sort of assumed carelessness; "and it's not always easy to march straight in the teeth of what the world generally considers *isn't* right." He had flung the cat away from him, and was now leaning his arms on his knees, and looking up at Mary with a smile; but it was a harassed, half-forced smile. She did not immediately speak, and, after a few minutes' silence, he sprang up, saying, "Well, I must be off now, and I won't forget that stuff for you next time, Stephen."

Mary put down her work, and saying hurriedly to her husband, "You won't miss me for half a minute, will you, Steph, if I go a few steps with the master?" she threw a plaid shawl over her head, and moved towards the door. As Rochefort

was opening it, she looked up into his face and said, "May I, Mr. Rochefort? I didn't ask you. It was very impertinent of me." The air of careless pride, almost always perceptible in his face and manner, except when he was under the control of strong emotions—and very perceptible just then, as he stood by the door and looked at her—vanished instantly at the sound of that pleading voice, and the look of those wistful eyes.

"You may come with me anywhere over the world, Mamie. Wrap your shawl round you—there;—now what is it?" he said, when they were on the drive and walking away from the lodge.

"Mr. Rochefort," she began in a suppressed voice, though there was no one within a quarter of a mile in face, or at the side of them; "do you mind telling me if it is true that you are to marry one of the young ladies at the hall? Don't be cross with me for asking."

"You may ask what you like—within reason. No; I've not asked either of them to marry me, Mary."

“But neither of them would say ‘no,’ if you did, would they?” inquired Mary, looking up anxiously.

“One of them would, to a dead certainty,” returned the master laughing, “for she is engaged already, and soon going to be married.”

“But the other?” persisted Mary, rather timidly.

“Oh, the other?” said Rochefort; and he said no more.

It was very hard work for the little woman to go on.

“It would be so nice—everyone thinks it would be so nice for you, Mr. Rochefort, to marry among people such as them—of a high, good sort you know, and with relations you could be proud of. Lord Belton’s an Earl, isn’t he, sir?”

“A Viscount.” “But he will be an earl some day.”

“Yes, some day, if he lives.”

“And she seems such a nice young lady, so gentle and pleasant-spoken, and lively too. They tell me about her, you know

from the house, Mr. Rochefort ; and everybody thinks it's to be a match."

"Do they ?" said Mr. Rochefort. "Well you see, Mamie, they know nothing about it, and it's not in the least necessary that they should." He spoke with some heat.

"There now, sir, I've vexed you. I knew I was being too bold," and Mary stopped short, prepared to beat a retreat.

"You've not vexed me. Nonsense. But why do you trouble your head about whom I marry, or if I marry at all ? Why does anybody ?"

"Mr. Rochefort will you promise—and promise faithfully—not to be angry with me, if I tell you something ? You know you've been kind and faithful to me for a many, many years, and now I want to speak faithful to you for once !" Her voice choked as she uttered the last words.

"Well ?" he said after a minute's pause.

"Hav'n't you been thinking—now don't, *don't* be angry with me—hav'n't you been thinking something of a young lady at

Leyton, that used to live at Gowerford, and that's thought a great beauty?"

Absolute silence.

"Mr. Rochefort—some of them young ladies that are such beauties you know, arn't nothing else than beauties, they arn't indeed."

Rochefort never spoke. No human being except his mother, when she was in a passion, had ever ventured as far as this with him before.

"My Stephen's cousin—Susan Westbury, they call her—works there," continued Mary, trembling all over violently, but determined to be brave till she had had her short say out, "and she has seen a good deal of the young ladies—and heard things as well, of course. . . . She has seen you, Mr. Rochefort, when you have been there."

What the master's face expressed Mary never knew. She dare not look.

"It's not a high enough match for you," continued the poor woman, now hardly able to speak; "but it's not so much that, I'm thinking of." She stopped from sheer in-

ability to proceed, until he uttered some re-assuring word. He gave it after a few moments.

“Well, Mamie, . . . it’s not so much that——”

“Then it *is* true—you are engaged to her?” exclaimed his foster-mother, forgetting everything else, standing still, and heart and breath seeming to stand still with her.

“Yes, it is true.”

She stood looking at him, with an indescribable look, but one which, in after years, he recalled constantly; as if, at the moment she gave it, it had been photographed on his heart.

“Then good-bye, Mr. Rochefort,” she said at last, and in an altered voice. “Steph may be wanting me. I must not say any more.”

“Why have you said what you have, Mary?”

“You must forgive me,” she answered, sorrowfully; “I did not know it had gone as far as that, sir, or I would not have

spoken. But I meant well; you know that, Mr. Rochefort. Good-bye, sir; Steph may be wanting me."

He looked at her with a vague fear, but also with something like anger in his heart.

She drew her shawl again about her head, to hide her tears, for they were beginning to fall. Her whole manner was strangely subdued and changed.

He was left to walk home through the park alone, with the remembrance of her face and voice haunting him. He was walking onward, in somewhat gloomy mood, his eyes bent to the earth, and his thoughts absorbed, when he almost fell against Gray, who happened to be crossing the park in that direction.

"Hollo!" exclaimed the master, stopping suddenly short, and looking up.

"Beg your pardon, sir," returned the bailiff, touching his hat.

"Warm weather for Christmas, isn't it?" said Rochefort, and then was going on.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the bailiff again; "but could you spare me five

minutes, sir?—not if it's inconvenient, sir; but——”

“It's not inconvenient, if you've anything to say. Well?”

“I wanted to speak to you a little about the men, sir. I'm in a very difficult position.”

“The old worry up again about their not choosing to do things if Davison doesn't give the orders?”

“Something of that sort, sir?”

“And who do they think is their master?” demanded Rochefort, on fire at once. “Do they think I give authority to any man I will not see obeyed? I can tell you, that if I give them orders to harness the horses to the backs of the carts, they will have to try and do it.”

Gray saw that he was worried and irritated, though he did not know what about.

“Yes, sir, they would try and do it for you, but not for me,” he answered, half smiling.

“They will have to do what any man I set over them orders to be done. I have

only one word to say to you. Dismiss any-one who is insubordinate on the spot. How do you get on with Davison?"

"Very well, sir; but you know his ways are older than mine, and the men are used to them, and think there's no need to change in anything. Whether it be about—the machinery, or the fields, or the stock, or the buildings—unless it's what they've been used to, or old Davison gives the order himself, there's unpleasantness and sulkiness about it, or else the thing isn't done at all." And then Gray proceeded to give various particulars.

Rochefort, who was fond of farming and fond of his farm, became interested, and finally spent an hour with his bailiff in talking over farming matters generally, and going the round of his stock and out-buildings. At last he said,

"Well, Gray, I shall give the whole affair up into your hands when you have been a year with me, but not before. In the meantime, you may depend on me for there being no more insubordination. If

there is, I have told you how to treat it. Now, I must be off."

"Mr. Longley—sir——" Having got so far, Gray stood twisting his hat in his hands, and became very red up to his temples. Rochefort stood before him, in just the way which gave many people the impression of his being both proud and unapproachable; and, as he stood, he looked straight into the somewhat confused face of his bailiff. It did not make it easier for the man to say what was on his mind.

"If you have no objection, sir—if there is no reason against it—I—am thinking of getting married, sir."

"That's right," said the master, heartily, "I am glad to hear it." Gray ceased twisting his hat and looked up.

"It will not make any difference you know, sir, in any way."

"Except to you," returned Rochefort laughing; "and it is no one else's affair. Who is it? Davison's daughter!"

"Yes, sir. We know each other well now, sir; and as she can't leave her father, we

thought of all living together here at the farm."

"There's no objection on earth that I see. Well—I wish you all sorts of happiness, Gray, and I am sure you will have a first rate wife."

"Thank you, sir, for saying so ; I believe I shall. I thought I should like you to know, sir, before we came to-night."

"I'm very glad you've told me. And when is it to be ?"

"Well, sir, we're neither of us as young as we have been, so I thought there was no good in putting it off. I was going to have the banns put up next Sunday."

"I wish mine were going to be put up next Sunday," said Rochefort. "Good morning," and then they parted.

In the great kitchens and servants' hall at Riverswood, preparations were going hotly forward for the labourers' Christmas Eve dinner. The walls and roof were generously decorated with dark green fir ; with glossy box and laurel ; and with the

shining prickly holly studded with its clusters of scarlet berries. There was plenty of holly on the Riverswood estate, and now it peeped out everywhere ;—from behind the rows of old willow-pattern earthenware on the great oaken dressers dark with age ; from behind the burnished candlesticks, and old pottery, and carved tankards on the mantle-shelves ; from behind the grim engravings framed in black oak, which had once done duty in the best apartments of the old manor, and been thought wonderful works of art. In the enormous fire-place of the dining hall, crackled two or three logs, which, of themselves were sufficient to light the room, and to cast warmth and glow upon every face within it.

In the outer hall—its leaves bedecked with a mock snow, its coloured waxen tapers ready for lighting, its roots planted firmly in a tub half hidden with a wreath of holly and laurel—stood the famous tree. It was hung with glittering fruits, with little white bearded and snow-besprinkled “Christmas”

figures ; with golden oranges, with gilt and transparent banners, with silk bags of bonbons tied with gold thread, with coloured glass bubbles ; and round pincushions with a mirror on one side, and the Pavilion at Brighton—or the Horse Guards—on the other. On the table lay the children's toys, together with a heap of bright comforters for the men, and a corresponding heap of knitted "cross-overs" for the women. The reigning lady of Riverswood always gave a present of this description, and also a large plum loaf to each family. The "master" gave the pieces of beef ; each piece being wrapped in about a yard of new linen cloth, and laid ready for its recipient on a side table.

Rochefort came in from his walks abroad in a somewhat abstracted and not altogether happy state of mind. In spite of his efforts to drive Mary's words out of his head, to say to himself that they were absurd—that they meant nothing—that of course he was the best judge of what Nora was, or was not ; that little speech of his

foster-mother's kept forcing itself into his mind with pitiless pertinacity.

"She has seen a good deal of the young ladies, *and heard things as well, of course.*" And who was "she?" A worker, a dress-maker, probably a tittle-tattle; *certainly* a fool. It was quite impossible that anybody should know anything against Nora. . . . Bah, he was becoming morbid; it was all prejudice, miserable, inexcusable prejudice. Rich and poor together might join in league to force him from his allegiance to his darling, but they should not do it.

He was standing against the old chimney-piece in the dining hall, about half an hour before the guests assembled, and was watching the servants place the last shining pewter mugs on the table, and mechanically give finishing touches to the position of the green and black-handled knives and forks, all the former having the broad curved ends formerly used for taking up, indiscriminately, peas or gravy. (These knives, being still found to suit to perfection the

tastes and manners of the "convives" on these festal occasions, and it being an old habit to use them, were always brought out for the Christmas Eve suppers).

The great bunch of mistletoe had been suspended to the centre lamp ; the last salt-cellar geometrically set in its place ; and Rochefort found himself alone, but for the company of the crackling logs. He had nothing to stay for, he had had nothing to come in for ; but he was absorbed, and did not care to move. All at once, the door was pushed gently open, and when he looked towards it, he saw two figures of girls, in white muslin, with bows of red ribbon, and golden combs in their hair. One came first, carrying something in both hands, the other followed.

" Oh, are you here, Rochefort ?"

" That's right," was his rather inconsequent rejoinder, as he moved from his somewhat moody position against the chimney-piece ; " the good spirits come to chase away the bad ! What on earth have you got there ?"

"It's a *crèche*," said Clara.

"A *crèche*?"

"Yes; our French mistress taught us how to make them, and I thought I could manage a beauty with the moss from your hill, so Mrs. Robinson had it gathered for me. Don't say anything till you see it finished."

Clara's "*crèche*" appeared to be a very prettily "*managed*" construction of moss and grasses, with a little grotto of sparkling stones in the middle of it, and some pieces of fir so arranged as to look like trees scattered over the landscape. Inside the grotto, on a little wooden manger, was laid a tiny wax figure to represent the infant Jesus. The Virgin Mary and Joseph (the former with a little veil of white tarlatane hanging down her back), were kneeling at his feet, and upon the mossy ground about the grotto stood a number of sheep and kine, while a little in the distance were seen approaching the "*Wise Men from the East*," with their costly offerings in their hands. At the head of the manger were two little white tapers ready for lighting; altogether,

it was a very pretty, effective little scene, and looked wonderfully "French," to say nothing more.

"They will all think I have turned Roman Catholic," said Rochefort, leaning across the table, to watch Erminia's disposal of the "wise men," while Clara was busy with some "banking up," at the side. "Where did you get the animals from?"

"Abstracted them from a Noah's Ark," replied Erminia; "Clara doesn't stick at anything when she has once made up her mind."

"That's right, Clara," pronounced her cousin, giving her one of the direct, pleased looks that would have been so entirely unsatisfactory to Lady Belton if she had seen it.

"Well—I think it's all done now," said Clara, standing a little way from the table, and looking critically at her erection, "and I must go and wash my hands."

"And I must go and take off these muddy boots, and make myself presentable," said

Rochefort. "I shall have to come in and mix the punch for them."

"Punch? Don't they all get drunk over it?" inquired Erminia, who, with her sister, was an almost unbending patroness of Adam's ale, pure and simple.

"Drunk, no!" said her cousin, laughing; "trust Mrs. Robinson for taking care of that. We only have it to keep up old customs. In the time of my great grandfather, I believe all the men used to end up under the table, and in the next generation things were capable of improvement. No women came to the dinner. Now we manage it all differently."

"But you give yourselves more and more trouble, it seems to me," said Erminia, "for instance, this year all these children are coming."

"Oh—ah," returned her cousin, becoming a little red as he spoke; "but I talked that over with my mother, and she showed me it would not do. 'Fools rush in,' you see, Minnie, 'where angels,' &c. The young ones are all coming in a body after dinner

is over, to see the tree, and have their toys, and then go away."

"And much better, too," pronounced Erminia. "There's such a thing as being too benevolent."

Erminia's sense was always wonderful.

It was the custom when dinner was ended, and the punch ladled out to each guest, for the health of the master to be drunk with honours, and then that of the mistress and the family, after which it was expected that the master would make a short speech. Rochefort was not, at this time, fond of speaking. Perhaps, however, the presence of so many who were waiting respectfully and a little anxiously for his words inspired him; perhaps the close proximity of his uncle (who, with arms negligently placed on the table, was surveying the company with a half curious, half amused smile on his lips and in his blue eyes), roused his pride in himself and in his men, for he said what he meant well.

("You will not mind my coming in with

you, Rochefort?" his uncle had said; "I should like to see the 'Aborigines.'")

The master's speech was as follows:—

"I thank you all heartily," he began, in his rich, strong young voice, "for the way in which you have drunk my health, and my mother's, and ——" No one knew what he had been going to say; he flushed up for a moment, and then resumed rapidly, "for the way in which you have drunk all our healths. This is the first time," he went on after a minute or two, "that I have taken my place among you as master—the first Christmas we have passed in my life-time without . . . him of whom I am sure we all think to-night . . . I trust that, by God's help, I may be enabled to live as honoured a life, and to leave behind me as unsullied a name as his." There were hearty cheers, which gave him time to steady his voice: "I don't know whether you will think I am preaching to you; I hope you won't:" (cries of "No, no, sir!" and "Not at all, Rochefort—wish you could give them an hour of it," in a low voice from Mr. Rutherford, the clergyman, who was always

invited on these occasions), “ but in thinking of my father I hope you will not forget the event we are all meeting here to celebrate, and which he celebrated with us so often,—you know what I mean—the birth of the One who is your Master and mine. I don’t know if you take in all that I mean by the word ‘Master;’ I don’t mean it to sound harsh or cold. But I believe that every one among us here is a responsible man, for whatever power or talent God has given him. I am quite certain that I shall be answerable for whatever power is mine I think that all servants owe to their masters very great duties: the duties of fidelity, honesty, and obedience. I feel this very strongly, and I want you all to feel it with me, as we stand together, nearly on the threshold of another year.” Some of the men, and some of the women, too, looked down with shamed faces and heightened colour. “And I need not say,” continued Rochefort, “that I set no one over you whom I do not desire should be treated with respect and obedience. If any man thus set over you prove himself un-

worthy of my trust, it is an affair between him and myself. I will never continue to give authority where I find it abused, but from the first to the last day that I give this authority, it is to be acknowledged and respected. If any man has a complaint to make, let him come to me and make it; if any man knows of dishonesty or deceit on the part of another, it is his duty to make it known to me; and now I think that is all I have—in a business sort of way—to say to you.” There was a minute’s pause. Then the young master, with an entirely changed voice and manner, went on: “I am very glad indeed to see you all here to-night, and I wish you all a very merry Christmas and happy New Year, and I am sure you wish me the same.” They responded as heartily—more heartily, perhaps—than if he had been praising them for an hour. “And now, let us drink to the Queen—and give her three cheers; and may God save the Prince of Wales, and *defend us from English Reds and a Republic.*” Rochefort half laughed as he said the words, but he meant

them. He was a Royalist to the back bone, and of an old Royalist family.

The toast was drunk with an enthusiasm which seemed as if it would rend the old raftered roof above their heads. After this the gentlemen took their departure.

“And this is the man my wife has been promising herself will break off his engagement—*if he’s nicely asked to do so,*” reflected Lord Belton, as he lounged into the drawing-room; “you may as well pack up your traps at once, my lady. There has been no game from the first.” Half-an-hour afterwards he was not quite so sure of it.

All the family went into the square hall to see the tree lighted up, and to watch the distribution of the presents. Eager little hands clutched them; faces burning with pleasure were bent on the newly-acquired treasures; longing and wondering eyes gazed on the splendours of the magic and illumined sight before them;—the planners of the treat were more than repaid by its perfect success. There was a great crush in the room, and Lady Belton and her

daughters were standing close to the fireplace. All at once, the voice of Mary Rudge was heard screaming "Fire! fire! the lady's on fire!" Lord Belton, who had gone to smoke a cigar in the library, heard the cry, and rushed like a madman into the hall.

"Where?—who?—what lady?—Stand off, you fools!" he said, pushing the terrified women to one side. But he was forestalled.—When Mary's cry was first raised, Rochefort had turned and seen his cousin Clara's double-skirted muslin dress, and her multitudinous muslin skirts in a blaze, almost to her neck. She screamed, and rushed forward, holding out her arms. The panic was fearful, and there was not a rug, shawl, or even table-cloth at hand to throw over her.

"Be still, for God's sake, Clara! and I will save you," said her cousin, and using all his strength he threw her backwards on to the floor. "Off with your coats, men!" he exclaimed, as he held her almost bound in his arms. "Gray, give me your

coat—there now—water—a rug—anything !”

Lady Belton had fainted ;—Erminia, as white as a sheet, was kneeling by her sister’s side ;—every one was rushing hither and thither ; but in a few moments a rug was brought, and then water. When they came, however, the fire was put out, and a few moments after, Clara was sitting up, hysterical with agitation, and in her father’s arms.

“ My darling, are you much hurt—much frightened ?” he said, scarcely able to control his voice. “ Thank God !—thank God !”

“ Here, bring us some brandy !” said Rochefort. “ Now, take this, Clara—drink it off—there’s lots of water in it,” he added. He held the glass to her lips with his steady hand till she drained it.

“ I can get up now, papa, and walk.”

“ Bring her a shawl, or cloak, Eugénie,” said Lord Belton, “ she is burnt—through everything she had on. Rochefort, my dear, good fellow, we can never thank you enough.” He was in tears as he spoke.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” said Rochefort, turning away, so that he missed Clara’s look of gratitude, which it was worth any man’s while to have seen; “it was an absurd thing not to have a guard on that fire.”

“And it’s very absurd of ladies to wear these ridiculous masses of muslin,” said Lord Belton, kissing his daughter as he spoke; “they’ve nearly cost you your life, my little Clara.”

“They *would* have done, but for my cousin,” she answered, turning her eyes towards him again, and this time he met her look. “Are you hurt, Rochefort?—My God, papa, look!”

He was very much burnt; his hands and part of one arm past use; his face and neck scarred; and now that the first excitement was over, and Clara’s safety ensured, he was both white and faint.

“Never mind,” he said, trying to smile; “if you’ll come with me into the library, mother, I’ll have some cotton-wool on. Take care of yourself, Clara—you’ll perhaps find yourself more burnt than you think.” And then he went off.

Clara's burns were slight, and a few days cured them ; but Rochefort was in agony for many hours, and in the doctor's hands for a week. He managed to come down for dinner on Christmas Day, and lay on the sofa, with his turkey cut up for him on a table at his side—Lord Belton presiding in his place. Clara, who appeared to be considerably upset by her accident—more so than one would have imagined likely in a young lady of such good nerve—choked over every other mouthful. Mrs. Longley was in low spirits, because Rochefort could not sit opposite to her at table ; altogether it was not a very cheerful dinner.

Clara said she was tired, and went early to bed ; but when Erminia joined her an hour afterwards, she found her dressed, and sitting by the fire, with the traces of very recent tears on her face. When Eugénie had brushed out their hair, and put away their dresses, she was allowed to go, and then Erminia asked—

“ What is it, Clary ? You've never been yourself since yesterday. If you feel ill,

it's not right of you to go on denying it; you ought to let us do something for you."

"I'm not ill," answered Clara, in rather a trembling voice; "I'm all right, thank you."

"Then what is it?" persisted Erminia, sitting down on a low stool by the fire and looking up in her sister's face.

"It's only that I'm sorry we ever came here."

"Why, I thought you were enjoying yourself so much?"

"Yes, I *was*."

"Are you sorry that Rochefort is so much hurt?" inquired Erminia, after a little pause; "is it that that is making you unhappy?"

Clara bit her lip very hard; so hard that it almost bled, but she could not prevent a few tears coming into her eyes.

"I suppose it's that, Minnie."

"Do you care for him, Clary?—I mean very much?"

"I suppose I do."

"But it's no use, you know," said her sister. "I am quite sure he means to go

on with his engagement with that—that Miss Heaton.”

“I am quite sure he does.”

“Then I wouldn’t care about him, Clary—any more than as a cousin, you know.” It was very proper advice, of course; and there was a short silence.

“Minnie, what am I to do? Shall I ask mamma to take us home?” asked Clara, at last.

“I am quite sure she won’t do that yet. You see this air suits her head so well. She has not had a head-ache since she came, and then there’s the hunting for papa.”

Clara took a few turns in the room, and at last brought out this sentence: “Minnie, I shall never marry. I will be the good maiden aunt to your children.”

“Oh, what stuff!” exclaimed Erminia, rising suddenly from her stool. “I never heard such utter nonsense, Clara. I shouldn’t a bit wonder if you marry at the end of your second season. Girls always do who say they are going to be old maids.” Her sister answered nothing.

“All the same,” reflected Erminia, when she was settled in bed, and had told Clara she was going to sleep, so as to discourage further conversation, “it’s very hard on Clary to be brought down here, and then be expected to go home heart-whole, unless Mr. Rochefort chooses to lose his heart to her. I think it iniquitous; and then that stupid fire coming to cap it all! Of course, he’s a hero to her, now that he has saved her life and is burnt in consequence. Well, it’s mamma’s affair. She has brought Clara into it, and must see her out of it as well as she can.”

Poor little Clara — as girls of that foolish age will do (they learn afterwards that it ruins the looks and is of no earthly good) — stayed awake about half the night. She loved her cousin with all the strength of her honest and unspoiled heart; she knew intuitively that everybody would be glad if he loved her; he would never love her; — what was she to do? How was she to cure herself of her “grievous wound,” without aid, with no

experience of what such wounds were, or how they were ever cured? Trying to solve this unsolvable question, one for which the perfect answer has never yet been found—and in this world never will—she fell at last asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

A FEW evenings after the events last recorded, when every one was in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Longley was tranquilly dispensing tea in the old Sèvres cups, Lord Belton suddenly threw up his paper, drew his cup towards him and said,—

“Rocheport, I never knew till the other night that you were such a distinguished Tory and Royalist. You ought to have lived in the days of the Cavaliers.”

“If I had, I should have stuck to the king, and followed Prince Rupert to the death,” said Rocheport; “and that is what we did do—I don’t say that we were right.”

“Not right?”

“I suppose not. We owe our liberties

to those cursed Roundheads. We tried the Stuarts all through, and there was no good blood in them, except what poor Charles gave us in his best days."

"I am always dreadfully sorry for that poor Charles," put in Erminia; "and then the Cavaliers were so brave and faithful, and must have looked so beautiful, if they were anything like their pictures."

"It's their *boots* which so particularly affect me," said Lord Belton. "I can't resist those boots. They touch the tenderest chords of one's heart. But, Rochefort, you are such a Radical in many of your notions that I can't understand your Toryism in chief points."

"Oh, no man is entirely consistent," returned his nephew; "an entirely consistent man would be the most intolerable bore, the greatest fool living. For myself, I should like to give my vote alternately to each side, to keep the balance even."

"I hope, Rochefort, you will do no such thing," said his mother; "the Longleys have always voted on the right side."

“Will you undertake, mamma, always to keep me informed as to which is the right side?”

“*Certainly* I will. And I am sure, with your notions about thinking so much of the poor, and getting up so many schools for them, and increasing their wages, and mixing more with them, and all that sort of thing, the only thing you can do to keep your proper ‘balance,’ as you have just been saying, is to vote for men who don’t want to go on quite so fast.”

It was one of the wisest speeches Mrs. Longley had ever made.

“Do you mean to say, Rochefort,” began his uncle leaning back in his chair, with one of his peculiar and rather mocking smiles, “that you advocate (among other things) *any living being* in the poorer classes getting more wages than he is getting now?”

“I never said I did. It was my mother who said so.”

“Because, my dear fellow, whatever you gave them they would *drink*, and only have

the more superfluous strength to expend in kicking and murdering their wives. The lower class, as a rule, are brutes. That's my conviction."

"Papa, what a horrible opinion you have of everybody!" said Clara, at this juncture.

"My dear child, that is only because I know the world."

"The idea is untenable," pursued Rochefort, "that either increased means or increased education would bring about increased crime; because, on the whole, the higher you go in society the less you are confronted with brutal and objectless cruelty, and vice. If there was a little more equality in the world as regards money, we should not only have less misery, but less sin."

"Are you a Communist, Rochefort?"

"No, my lord."

"Do you intend to divide your estate into small portions on the next convenient opportunity, and give each of the fellows I saw here the other night a piece?"

"No, my lord, I intend to keep every foot of it in my own hands."

And then there was silence for a few minutes.

“There is no use, Rochefort,” resumed his uncle in an easy tone of voice, as he got up and stood on the hearthrug to warm his back; “there is no use in trying to be *too good* for this world. It is a fault thousands of people fall into every day, and it is really a very great one. One ends by becoming thoroughly disappointed with the world as a whole, and the world is disappointed in us. Believe me, it does not want half the services of us that we fancy it does—and that we distract and half kill ourselves in trying to render.” In some humours, Rochefort would have laughed at this speech; he was not in one of those humours now. A certain shadow gradually deepened over his face, but he said nothing. His uncle and he had had skirmishes before this.

“Don’t speak so to him,” said Lady Belton in an under tone to her husband, as she passed in front of him.

“I know you think me nothing better

than an infidel, Rochefort," continued his uncle; "but you will see more clearly all I mean in ten or twenty years time. I used to believe in mankind when I was your age."

"And I shall believe in it till I die."

"You will see."

"When one has disbelieved in all goodness, and in the utility of all effort, for twenty or thirty years," pursued Rochefort, "*how does one feel? What is the retrospect like?*"

Lord Belton looked curiously at him for a moment, and then laughed.

"Well, Rochefort, you have asked me a question I cannot answer at once. But in the meantime, my dear fellow, do let me assure you that I admire and respect, as much as it is possible for any man to do, the spirit of enterprise, benevolence, reform, call it what you like, which I know has possession of you. In fact, I don't know what the world would do without it. But I have lived to find the world *so bad*, that I have come to the conclusion half the

effort spent upon it is useless, and worse than that—*wasted*. I do not say *all*. I say *half*. Of course if you come to halve the amount of effort lazy fellows like myself would spend upon it, you do not leave us much ; but half of such effort as you, and men like you, would expend, would mount up.”

“And what is to be done with all this vast amount of misapplied effort, my lord ? —the other half of what is wanted ?”

“Let it be turned inwards,” replied Lord Belton, easily. “Let it be used upon ourselves, to control the extravagance of our sympathies, our beliefs, our resolves. Believe me, it would do good. We allow our feelings to be excited, to be harrowed ; when it would be better both for ourselves and others (but especially for ourselves), if we remained calm. We commit irreparable errors, because we allow our reason to be overbalanced by our impulses. We rush headlong into theories and schemes which we believe to have the warrant of truth (and which we see crumble away before our

eyes), because we have not learnt to examine dispassionately and by the light of sound practical sense whatever we engage in or uphold." Rochefort remained silent several minutes, but at last said,

"Then you do not think this empire over one's self and one's impulses is compatible with much effort for the good of others? You would purposely *make* it incompatible?"

"It is not compatible," returned Lord Belton, "with the *insane amount* of effort some men expend, with the idea of attaining that good. I approve of no mad schemes, no violent proselytism, preaching, reforming. Everything must be done in moderation, if it is to do any real good."

"*Point de zèle—point de zèle—et point de zèle!*" said Rochefort, laughing at last.

"I think you must acknowledge, Rochefort," put in his mother, suddenly and unconsciously changing the whole current of the conversation, by one of her peculiar master strokes, "that what your uncle says is very correct. Some of these violent

changes are quite shocking. Talking of preaching, for instance, I shall never forget when we were at ——shire Wells a summer or two ago, seeing our old friend Henry Torrington, who turned so very religious, standing up on a chair in the midst of a rabble of people, preaching to them like some common Methodist, and several men who looked as if they might be tinkers and shoemakers standing close by him with hymn-books in their hands. We heard them begin to sing directly afterwards, and it was really dreadful.”

“Is that the Henry Torrington whose brother and cousin are in the Life/Guards?” inquired Lady Belton.

“Yes; and his sister married Lord Strange-ways; and he is own cousin to the Duke of Pendlebury. I believe there is a meeting-house of some kind at the ‘Wells,’ where he preaches nearly every Sunday, and has prayer-meetings and that kind of thing.”

“What an awful character,” observed Lord Belton, with solemnity.

“*I think so,*” returned Mrs. Longley, a little severely; for she did not miss the satire in her brother-in-law’s ready sympathy (men who ridicule almost all enthusiasm, or zealous piety themselves, are often the first to satirize the expression of the same ridicule or pretended horror in others); “*I think it is a very bad example to put before people, to ignore the clergy and the churches and all the proper ways of worshipping, and set themselves up in stead. Of course if people see him do it, who ought to know better, and who has been well educated and so on,—it—a—well, it upsets all their ideas of right and wrong, of course.*”

“*I suppose he thought he was doing right,*” remarked Lady Belton. “*I remember he was a fine, tall, rather handsome fellow when we knew him.*”

“*Yes, he was quite a favourite everywhere, and a very good dancer. Now all the family have given him up, or he has given them up. There is no intercourse between them, I believe.*”

"Because he is too good for them, perhaps," said Rochefort, bluntly.

"Too good, Rochefort! Why, he might have been as religious as he liked—going to church, and giving away money, and leading a good life, without estranging himself from all his best friends and mixing with people of the very lowest ranks."

Rochefort was heard to mutter something very indistinctly about it being said somewhere that the "first shall be last," &c.

"What are you saying, Rochefort?" inquired his mother, looking at him.

"Oh, nothing, mamma. It mightn't apply, of course. The words just came into my head."

"Well, now, do you think he was *right*, Rochefort? Is that conduct of the sort you admire? I should like to know, because sometimes I really stand in dread of the next new idea you will bring out."

Nobody could help laughing.

"Are you afraid of my going to preach at the Wells, mamma?" inquired her son.

"Well, no, *not quite that*," returned his

mother; "because I hope you know your duty better to yourself and to society, and because I hope you will never forget you are a gentleman!"

"And do you think," exclaimed Rochefort, flushing up, and with a sudden emphasis that made them all turn and look at him, "do you think, if I didn't do as he does, that it would be for any of *those* reasons? Isn't he at this moment a far nobler and braver man than I am, or am ever likely to be? I shouldn't preach, because I haven't the courage to do it—because I am not good enough—not Christian enough—not self-denying enough to do it. Who in their heart of hearts believes that the fellow is a worse gentleman for being what he is? Not I, for one."

"Don't say any more, Rochefort," entreated his mother. "You make me miserable. We had better talk of something else."

"Yes, it is always better to talk of something else when one gets the least bit below the surface," said Rochefort, throwing a

paper knife which he had taken up while he last spoke across the table.

His mother did not choose to reply.

“Did you ever see this Mr. Torrington?” inquired Lady Belton, who was quietly continuing her foot-stool cover in silk-and-beads, “that you are such a great upholder of his, Rochefort?”

“Upholder of his! I don’t know that I especially uphold him. We might disagree if we came to talk together—I mightn’t approve of half the things he does—but of this I am certain, that he is a brave, truly good fellow, and that it is absurd for people who could not, and would not, go through and suffer what he does ‘to save their souls alive,’ to run him, and such as him, down.”

“Well, but did you ever see him?” repeated his aunt.

“Yes,” answered Rochefort, “but it’s not a very pleasant subject with mamma. It was this way. I went over to the Isle of Man about three summers ago with Glanville. We knocked about on the cliffs

(you never saw anything so beautiful as the delicious grass and the flowers there ; and on the shore there were exquisite pools and grottoes, with sea-weeds and shells in them—it's a first rate place), and in the evening we rowed out in the bay, and fished till nine or ten o'clock. Well, we noticed several times that a fellow was standing up at the pier head, on the base of the great stone lamp-post, and trying to collect people round him. We did not take much notice at first, but one day we came back earlier than usual from the water. We had been rowing about all the afternoon, and were tired, and going home to supper. We gave up our boat at the stairs, and walked up on the pier. There was something of a row there—men jeering and laughing—some pretending to sing psalms in a horrid nasal twang—one giving out a low song from a dirty paper he held in his hand, in a pretended sanctimonious fashion, which made all the people round him, roar. On the broad stone ledge of the column stood the same man we had observed before,

and I saw then, for the first time, what a thorough gentleman he was. He was nearly white, though ; and his lips trembled very much. I think he had a little black Bible in his hands. He stood quite firm, but I never saw a man's face work as his did. After we had stood watching a few minutes, all at once—I don't know what possessed me—I sprang up by the side of him, and held out my hand. I shall never forget how he took it and held it. I have never seen the man since, but if I did, I should feel as if we were friends. I stayed by him till the mob was quiet — I think some were quiet just to stare at me, and wonder what I was going to do next—and, when he had got a hearing, I shook hands with him and went off."

"Yes, and it got all over the place," said Mrs. Longley, "and he was stared at wherever he went ; and two old maids found out the hotel he and Mr. Glanville were staying at, and left a parcel of tracts for him, and a notice of some services to be held in a poky little room somewhere. It's not that I care

about his having jumped up for a minute or two by poor Captain—by poor Torrington. Of course it was a shame to jeer at the man—they might have gone away if they didn't want to listen—but it's all the things you *let yourself in for*, if you encourage these sort of people in the least."

"Did you ever go to that meeting they sent you the notice about?" inquired Clara, speaking for the first time.

"Yes, I did—the next Sunday evening. Ernest wouldn't, but I made myself up so that I thought they wouldn't know me, and I walked out directly the service was over—so you see no harm was done."

"I didn't mean that any harm would be done any-way," said Clara, in a very low voice. Rochefort turned his eyes, and looked at her with a sort of half-surprised interest in his expression, but said nothing.

"Well, and what did you hear, see, or suffer?" inquired Lord Belton, carelessly.

"Hear?—I heard a man pray as I have never heard anyone pray before or since."

"Some poor, uneducated fellow, I sup-

pose, who couldn't pronounce his 'h's,'" declared his mother.

"He wasn't, mamma," returned her son, "he was a gentleman, and the German tutor of Mr. Torrington's own son. I used to see him out with them. He was a very refined-looking fellow, and manly enough."

"Well," said Lord Belton, pretending to yawn, "I hope they are all well and happy,—this Mr. Torrington—the tutor—the old maids with the tracts, and every one of them. I only know it is fatiguing beyond everything even to make to one's-self a conception of this style of happiness, and idea of duty. But in spite of it all, Rochefort," he added, half-laughing, "I envy you your momentary popularity. I wish I had ever achieved reputation on only half such good grounds."

"Good grounds!" repeated Rochefort, colouring (at this time a very little thing sent the young, warm blood to his cheeks), "I was thoroughly ashamed of myself and of everybody else. Why, it would not have required half the courage in me, to have

gone up and fought it out with each man in that rabble, singly, that it did in poor Torrington only to stand up silent before them, with his open Bible in his hand. That was courage, if you like."

"Courage of the sort that Everard would have repressed," observed Lady Belton, quietly, as she snipped off the ends of her wool and silk; "not the right sort, or tending the right way, Rochefort."

"Mamma," said Clara, "one never knows whether you speak seriously or in fun, when you say those kind of things."

Lord Belton laughed.

"It is very difficult to know how to live in this world, isn't it, Clara?" said Rochefort, looking towards his cousin. "Particularly when half the people who talk to you say what they don't really mean."

In this rather desultory drawing-room conversation, certainly without satisfaction in its beginning, middle, or end; in which one man had said a good deal that he only half meant, and in which the other had been carried away by a very natural instinct to

defend a brave and a good man who was under-rated—the generous and warm heart of little Clara Belton found “un peu de tout,” with which to nourish her romantic feeling for her engaged cousin, and the “saviour of her life.” Of course, as Erminia had predicted, he was considered the “saviour of her life,” and had become a hero to her. Now, he was everything else that was noble. The faithful and steadfast little heart was bound to him for ever; and he was as unconscious of it as men generally are of the things that would “make for their peace;” that is, of the devotion of the hearts that would serve them best; and whose least flame is perhaps worth the whole of what they snatch into their arms, thinking they have won their life’s happiness with the possession!

CHAPTER X.

A DAY or two after the conversation just recorded, as Mrs. Rudge was putting the finishing touches to the crust of a beef-steak pie, indenting the edges with a tea-spoon turned up-side down, and laying a cluster of leaves symmetrically round the cut in the middle, she was startled by a sudden rap at the door, and, hastily rubbing her hands on her apron, and pulling down her sleeves, went to open it.

“Busy, Mary?” said the master, walking in; and then, after a few words to Steph, he stood in a pre-occupied sort of way with his back to the fire.

“The pie’ll be done in a moment, sir.”

“I wanted to speak to you for five minutes, if I could, Mary,” said Mr. Longley.

“Wish I wasn’t such an old logger-bones, sir,” said Stephen Rudge, touching the little cap he always wore in-doors, to keep, as he said, the draughts in the ’ouse from his ’ed, “and I’d soon put myself out of your way.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” said Rochefort, without thinking of his words in the least.

“I’ve put my pie in the oven now, Mr. Rochefort,” said Mary, “and if you don’t mind stepping into the little back kitchen, it’s quite clean. I did it up and hearth-stoned it yesterday, and it’ll be better than the garden, where it’s so dreadful wet, from the snow and rain yesterday.”

The “back kitchen” was a small wash-house; also a scullery, also a larder. Mary shut the door behind her, and Rochefort leaned against a bare wooden table that was jammed up against the wall, and suffered from some unsteadiness in one of its legs. He did not feel himself to be in a very dignified position, but perhaps the fact of his being in Mary’s little scullery was not the thing that chiefly contributed to this feeling. He was doing what every proud man

hates to do, and hates himself while he is doing ; taking steps to get information that will be of service to him, in an indirect way. He had pondered over certain words of his foster-mother's, till he had become wretched, and could support life no longer without some solution of them. He had twisted them into every imaginable meaning, he had (as he said to himself) infinitely magnified their importance, he had thought of the tears, the impulsive expressions of regret, the look almost of dread which had followed them. At last, suspense became unendurable ; he would know plainly, and once for all, what anyone had to say, what anyone *could* say against his darling : no matter what it was, it had better come out now than later, than too late. Driven by these thoughts, he had come to seek his foster-mother, swallowing his pride as he could, and with something like a prayer in his heart that he should hear nothing which should have the right to shake his allegiance, or to cast one shaft at his passionate, believing love.

“Mary,” he said, clearing his throat with some effort, “I want you to tell me exactly, without shading off or disguising anything, what it was that you have heard about Miss Heaton which makes you think she—I—
—I might ever be sorry to have married her.”

Mary turned as red as the fire, which was at that moment “doing” her beef-steak pie to perfection; but she was not sorry Mr. Longley had asked the question. She was a brave little woman, and was prepared to do her best for the master, and for his future happiness, no matter what she might be called on to say or swear to, or how she herself might suffer in his opinion in consequence.

“Well, Mr. Rochefort,” she began, her cheeks now almost in a blaze. “I don’t see as you’re called upon to go asking *any* young lady to have you that wouldn’t be thankful, and grateful, only to get a chance; no matter if it’s the noblest and beautifullest in the land. I wouldn’t do it if I were you. That’s what I meant.”

“But I don’t see in the least what you mean,” returned the master, as he stood looking at her. “Of course I know you would like me to have one of the Princesses; but that is a peculiar notion of yours, and not practicable. What else do you mean?”

“Do you want to know?” inquired Mrs. Rudge, without raising her eyes.

“Yes, of course I want to know. At least I have come here for that object. I don’t know whether it is a good one.”

“Don’t go and think that way, Mr. Rochefort; I’d rather have it off my mind. . . . You remember that I told you how Steph’s cousin, Susan Westbury, works there. . . . I mean at the Beeches?”

“Yes,” said the master impatiently,—
“well?”

“She’s worked there for a many years, and the young ladies always make a great deal of her, and go and talk to her sometimes as she sits at work—though that’s neither here nor there—for I don’t mean anything they said to her. But young ladies always do that, you know sir, and if

you only knew what a lot they'll sit and say to the dress-maker that they wouldn't think if you was to pay them for it, of telling their 'mas ;—talk—talk—talk—till they've told her all about their governess, and their beaux, and their little secrets, and I don't know what besides. Susan's told me how they go on, often and often."

Rochefort could not help laughing.

"Well, you see, Mamie, I know nothing about all that."

"*Of course*, you don't," returned Mrs. Rudge, looking at him with an almost pitying expression in her face, "what should you know?—I'm blest if I think you know anything about their ways!"

"Look here, Mary, I can't stay talking nonsense ; go on, if you have anything to say," insisted the master.

"Well, sir, Miss Nora always used to tell Susan—though that's not what I have on my mind—still she always used to tell Susan that her lover should either play or sing beautifully, and should be a great dancer—and should live in London ;—she doesn't like the country."

“Did she say that?” inquired Rochefort suddenly.

“She’s always saying that she doesn’t like the country, Susan says.”

“Oh, there’s nothing in that. She may like it under different circumstances. You haven’t brought me here, have you, to hear that when Miss Heaton was a child, she fancied she should like a lover who lived in London, and who would sing and waltz with her all day?—I dare say that is the ideal of thousands of girls: my first love was a very stout tall maiden lady of five-and-thirty, with black hair, and masses of rings and bracelets, which used to glitter all evening to my distraction, as she sat playing whist with my father. You don’t think I want to marry her now?”

“But perhaps Miss Heaton fancies the same sort of lover *now*, as she did then,” was Mary’s rather deliberate answer, to this off-hand tirade. There was a dead silence, during which Mrs. Rudge twirled her apron into tight sausages, and the

master stood and watched her. Presently, he said, in a totally changed tone—

“What do you mean by that, Mary?”

“I mean that Susan *knows* as much,” replied Mary trembling, but resolved not to give up the fight. But it was too much for mortal, at least for manly endurance.

“Damn the woman!” exclaimed Rochefort, in such sudden passion, that his foster-mother instinctively laid hold of the door behind her, as if to beat a retreat—“and what business has she to know or to hear anything of my affairs or Miss Heaton’s? who’s dared to tell her anything?—and how has she dared to repeat anything?” He walked up and down in that poor little bit of a kitchen, like a man gone out of his senses; then suddenly stopped before Mrs. Rudge, and said,

“Well—go on. Whatever she knows or has said, I am here to hear it, so much the worse for my folly in coming—only take care that it is *true*,” and then he waited.

“Did you not often go there with your friend, that handsome young man as was

staying with you in the autumn?" inquired Mrs. Rudge. She dare not look up, and the master never spoke.

"Mr. Rochefort Susan was one day in the school-room, mending a carpet; and the young ladies were in their own room, which is next—and *she heard them talking about him*—she ought to ha' shut the door, between; but she didn't—she waited so long that then she didn't like to shut it, lest they should think she'd listened; so she just finished her work and crept away—and she told me all she heard—every word of it."

"What did she hear?" inquired the master, still controlling himself by a terrible effort, and with his heart beating as if it would break. But the next moment, he made an impulsive movement away from the table against which he still leant, and broke out in a stifled, passionate voice, "Don't tell me anything. I didn't know what I was saying—I have been a fool—but I am not going to listen to what a woman overhears."

“Mr. Rochefort—Mr. Rochefort, you’re not angry with me—you’re not going to do anything!” exclaimed his foster-mother in terror,—putting herself between him and the door.

“No—no. I have no one but myself to blame. I came to you—” and with a sort of force, he put her to one side and went through into the kitchen. A few moments he stood as if in a dream on the old patch-work rug before the fire; then, suddenly saying “Good-bye, Steph — good-bye, Mary,” he took up his hat, and walked out of the house.

He did not go home; he went to the stables, ordered his horse, and paced the yard up and down till it was ready, thinking of Ernest, till his head reeled.

“I’m afraid it’s going to come down ’eavy, sir, before long,” said the groom, touching his hat, as he brought up the horse; “them clouds look awful black.”

“Send in for my leggings, then—be quick.”

“And your whip, sir?”

“I can’t hold my whip—I don’t know how I shall manage the reins.”

He was gloveless, and his right hand was still in a sling. His boots were made more for tramping over fields than for putting through light silver stirrups; his coat was old; his felt hat had seen good service in rain and hail and sunshine, and the pain of holding the double reins in his burnt hand made him flinch, and bite his lip hard. He was in strange courting trim.

“I’ve exercised her well this morning, sir,” said the groom; “can you manage the reins do you think, sir?”

“Yes; I shall be used to the touch, directly. Open the gates,” said the master impatiently; and then he struck off down the drive, on his mad way to his lady-love.

He did not allow himself to think, as he galloped along, or he would have been wretched. The rain came down and drenched him, but he felt nothing; he was conscious but of one desire—the desire to see Nora; to ask her if she loved him; to

know his fate, and get the horrible suspense over. The thought crossed his mind once, "Suppose she should not be in? Suppose she should have gone anywhere?" But the bare idea was unendurable; he thrust it from him, and only rode on faster than ever.

When he arrived at the "Beeches," he heard Nora giving a music-lesson to one of her younger sisters in the schoolroom. Mr. Heaton could not afford both a governess and a carriage, and as a carriage was absolutely indispensable, Lizzie and Nora divided the teaching of their younger sisters between them. Nora was now playing the treble part of one of Czerny's immortal exercises for beginners, while little Miss Annie stumped away at the same air with both hands, and made innumerable mistakes. Thank God, she was there at any rate!

"If you please, Miss Nora, Mr. Longley is in the drawing-room, and wishes to see you."

Miss Nora started up; but she was in

an old dress, and (as she considered) an unbecoming one; and, before she could descend to her lover, she must rush to her room and change it. It was true that she was quick about it, and that she did not know Mr. Longley was wet through, or that his heart was throbbing like a steam-engine with pain and torturing anxiety. If she had, let us do her the credit to suppose she would have come at once.

When they had been about three minutes together in the drawing-room, Rochefort said, with a good deal of effort, "Will you spare me a few minutes more, Nora, while I ask you something important—very important to both of us?"

"Something important?" she repeated, rather frightened; "yes, of course, I want to know anything that is important; and indeed, now that I think of it, what *a time* you have been in coming to see me, Rochefort! I thought you were never coming any more." The pretty way in which she pouted as she said this struck a thrill of joy through her lover's heart.

“Have you felt it long, Nora? Have you wanted to see me?”

“Of course I have! It’s dreadfully dull when you don’t come, and I’m thinking all the time that perhaps you’ve forgotten me. And then these ‘cousins’ that have been staying in the house—grand, fashionable young ladies, I daresay—and perhaps you like one of them better than me now; although they’ve been and made you burn yourself!”

“Do you think it is possible I could like one of them better than you?”

“It might be possible, of course,” she answered, twirling his watch-chain as she spoke. “Well, *are* they very pretty, and very charming, Rochefort?—and are you going to give me up for one of them, I want to know?”

He was fast becoming very happy; but there was that dreaded question to ask, and to have answered, before he could be satisfied.

“Nora, I came here to ask whether you had any wish to give *me* up?”

“*What?*” she exclaimed, in a tone of half-indignant astonishment, and withdrawing her hands suddenly from his.

“There is a little foolish impression about—I hope it is foolish—that—that you have been a little taken with—with, in fact, my friend, Mr. Ernest Glanville, who was with me so long in the autumn.”

Nora blushed up to her hair. But at the moment that she felt herself blushing, she felt also that she must retrieve her position instantly—without a moment’s hesitation—or it might be lost for ever. She *had* liked Mr. Glanville—liked him very much indeed; his tastes and temperament accorded better with her own, than did the tastes and temperament of the young gentleman now before her; at the same time she did not suppose he could marry her, and she would have thought twice about giving up such a position as that of the mistress of Riverswood, if he could. Nora had many amiable points, but she had been brought up by a worldly-minded and superficial mother, and would have been more than a woman if she

had not imbibed some of the poison which was always being tendered for her acceptance in the shape of worldly axioms, advice, and example.

For the rest, the child was by no means indifferent to her lover. She was proud of him, and very proud of possessing him. She thought him very clever, and, as the phrase goes, “too good for her;” rather peculiar—a little too changeable in humour—but very good, very kind. She could not be said to *love* him, but she was flattered that he loved her, and would have been very jealous of anyone who had in any way attempted to diminish that love; she hoped she should make him happy, and satisfy him, after they were married; but she was much more anxious that he should make *her* happy, and satisfy all the whims and fancies of her own vain little heart. It is generally those women who have least to give in the article of heart, soul, and intelligence who demand from their husbands in return the most absolute and unwavering surrender to themselves of every thought, every affection, every desire or hope.

Nora stood with that awkward red blush upon her face before her lover. For him it was a moment of almost unendurable suffering; but she made it only a moment. She regained her ground with astonishing quickness and tact. The position demanded both, and she felt it.

“It is the most utter nonsense, Rochefort!—I liked him a little, as I suppose anyone would do, he was so pleasant and kind; but do you think I *loved* him?” (It was quite true that she did not; for she *loved* neither of them.) “*Of course*, I didn’t. If he asked me to marry him to-morrow, I wouldn’t. I would have no one but you if fifty people asked me. I’m not half good enough for you, that’s all. But *you’re* good—I don’t think there’s anybody so good and faithful and true as you are—and you’re *sure* you don’t want one of your cousins instead of me, are you?”

We have clubbed the foregoing sentences together, as a matter of convenience; but they were uttered at intervals, the intervals being filled up with the kisses of a man

who was recklessly catching almost his death of cold, and taking every means to include his lady-love in his own danger.

Not till half an hour afterwards was he on his road home.

The results of this little expedition were of course deplorable. Mr. Longley was laid up with a dreadful cold and cough, and with such suffering and inflammation in his right arm that he was driven almost delirious, and had to be put to sleep for several nights with strong narcotics. The doctor kept him to his room for ten days, as a punishment for his foolhardiness.

“ Fifty women wer’n’t worth your going and risking your life in this fashion,” he said angrily. “ If you can do no better than ride twelve miles in pouring rain, just because the freak takes you to see how a girl’s looking, the sooner you’re married the better. . . . When is it to be ?”

It was, of course, known by everyone at Riverswood how Rochefort had caught his cold, and where he had been to catch it. There was no concealing it from his mother,

who scolded him with a rain of angry and disappointed tears, and then went and told her sister.

The two had a long talk together, after which Lady Belton was unusually taciturn for the remainder of the day. She said a few words to her husband, which drew from him only a slow whistle, a raising of the eyebrows, and a shrug of the shoulders, and then he went out to the stables. Poor Clara cried her eyes out in her bedroom, because her cousin was suffering from the injury of which she was the luckless origin, and because she should now probably see him no more before they went. She had an intuitive perception that they would go soon now, and she was not wrong.

About four days after Rochefort's drenching, when it became evident that he was a thorough invalid *pro tem.*, and with no chance of getting further than his mother's boudoir for a week, Lady Belton received a letter telling her that her darling "Alphonse"—her only and four-year-old son—had been seized with a cough, which she was *certain*, from the description, must be

hooping-cough, and no time was to be lost in hastening to his side—deeply as she regretted cutting short so delightful a visit, especially just when poor Rochefort was so ill, and his mother in such low spirits about him.

At the last moment, Clara managed to get up to her aunt unobserved; to take her hand, and to say, in a voice that struggled to be firm,

“And, Aunt Emily, please tell him that I shall never—none of us will ever—forget how brave and kind he was, and how I owe my life to him; and I—I hope he will be very happy. . . . You’ll tell him that, won’t you?” and then, resolutely strangling a very hard rising in the throat, Clara gave her aunt one more kiss, and hurried to the carriage.

When Mrs. Longley repeated that pretty and sincere little message to her son as he lay coughing and tossing about in his bed, he remarked impatiently, “What a confounded nuisance it all is!”

“What is a confounded nuisance, Rochefort?”

“That I should be laid up in this way, and not able to say good-bye to them ;— and that my uncle should miss all the hunting.”

“But I suppose it isn’t of the least consequence to you, Rochefort, that they have had to go without your saying good-bye to them ?”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t say good-bye to Clara, any way.” A fearful fit of coughing, which lasted two or three minutes, succeeded this avowal ; after which his mother gave him his medicine, and said he mustn’t talk any more. Presently, however, she said herself (the temptation being too strong, and the opportunity too good to be missed),

“It would have given me real pleasure, a short time ago, to have heard you express that regret, Rochefort.”

“What regret ?”

“That you have not been able to say good-bye to your cousin Clara.”

“Oh, I see. I couldn’t conceive what you meant.”

“I shall never forgive myself, Rochefort,” said his mother at last, “that I did not ask

your cousin to come here long ago. If I *had* done so, there might never have been any of this trouble—and I should have seen you suitably and honourably engaged—as you ought to be.”

“And as I am,” responded her son briefly. “Mamma (after a pause), how long am I going to be like this?”

“Dr. S—— thinks you will be much better in a few days, if you take care of yourself.”

“I’m not going to have inflammation of the lungs, or anything of that sort, am I?”

“I should never forgive you, or rather some one else, as long as I lived, if there was any chance of it,” returned his mother with unwonted energy; “but there is no fear, if you obey orders.”

“When shall I be able to go out again, do you think?”

“Oh, not for a long time,” said Mrs. Longley; with very decided satisfaction in her tone of voice.

“Mother, I wish you would give me a piece of paper and a pencil.”

“You are not to use your eyes, Roche-

fort, and you are talking too much. You ought to sleep after that medicine."

"You never told me it was to make me sleep before, mamma."

"Well it is ; I tell you so now. It's to stop the cough, and make you quiet."

"It's within an hour of post time," exclaimed Rochefort, as he looked at his watch. "You must give me that paper in ten minutes, mamma, at the furthest."

While the ten minutes were passing, he lay perfectly still, and his mother hoped he was going off to sleep. At the end of the time, however, "Now the paper please—and a book or something, to write on."

She sighed, and submitted unwillingly. He scribbled a few lines, leaning upon his left arm ; folded the sheet up, and tossed it to his mother, saying, "Direct it for me ; and then I'll promise to take that gruel for supper." She was obliged to smile, and to take out an envelope and address it to "Miss Nora Heaton, The Beeches, Leyton," though it was sorely against the grain. And from that hour she gave up hope.

CHAPTER XI.

THE winter brightened into spring ; spring warmed into summer ; from the middle of May the weather was perfect ; every morning rose blue and cloudless ; every evening sank to its rest, as if the day fainted of its own sweet fulness. The air was laden with the exquisite perfume of roses and musk and lilies ; breezes murmured amid the thick, dark leaves of chestnut, and ash, and beech trees, and tossed the yellow rain of the laburnum :—country lads walked with bunches of fragrant lilac in their hands, and the lasses and the children, with their aprons full of cowslips. There were exquisite sunsets ; evenings full of lingering, tender, shadowy beauty ; and balmy, moonlit nights.

On one of these evenings, Nora Heaton sat at her little writing-desk with a very prettily pinked-out sheet of exceedingly perfumed pink paper before her; a pen-holder with a very narrow-nibbed new pen in it in her hand, and a look of extreme thought and perplexity on her face. After some time spent in consideration, and in constantly dipping her pen into the ink, as if the ink contained inspiration, she finally (with many pauses, and many readings of each sentence after it was written), composed the following missive:—

“The Beeches, Leyton, July 25th.

“MY DEAR MRS. LONGLEY,

“Rocheport has asked me to write to you; but I am afraid it will not give you any great pleasure to see my hand-writing. However, as he wishes it, I will try to say what I feel, as well as I can. I know quite well that I am not worthy of the happiness and honour—for I assure you that I *do* feel he has honoured me very much—of being engaged to Mr. Longley; and I can quite understand that our engagement has been

a source of distress to you. Of course I know that he could have looked much higher for a wife, and I do not think he would have been refused wherever he looked. I feel I am not at all good enough for him, but I will try in every way I can to deserve him.” (What she meant by this phrase, Nora herself had not the least idea, but she thought it sounded the proper thing.) “I am very sorry that when he is giving me so much, I have not the least fortune to give him, and I suppose never shall have ; but Rochefort will never allow me to speak of that.

“I do hope that you will be so kind to us both, and so good to me, as not to let anything be changed at Riverswood on my account, when I come there—Rochefort particularly wishes me to say this, and of course I wish it, too—and that if you have no objection to it, dear Mrs. Longley, you will always remain mistress, and have everything exactly as you wish, and are used to, and not let me make any difference. I do not feel that I have written half that I wish to say,” (she had had the greatest possible

difficulty in constructing the above sentences, and was truly and devoutly thankful her task was now at an end,) “and I dare say I have expressed myself awkwardly, but I hope you will believe that it is my very earnest wish to please you, and not to cause any unhappiness between you and dear Rochefort, if I can possibly help it, and

“I remain, dear Mrs. Longley,

“always very sincerely and

“affectionately yours,

“HONORA HEATON.”

Well—it was done at last. A great weight ‘was off’ her mind, and Rochefort would be satisfied. Poor child, she had tried to bribe him with kisses, to soften him with tears, but all in vain, to be “let off” writing this terrible letter. Her lover, for once, was resolute. It was, of course, the proper thing to do, and was proved to be so by the fact that about a week after receiving and answering it, Mrs. Longley suffered herself to be driven to the Beeches, and actually paid a call of a quar-

ter-of-an-hour on Mrs. and Miss Nora Heaton. Nora was beautiful in her blushes, and in her dress of blue and white muslin, and merited by her appearance the remark Mrs. Longley made to her son after dinner.

“She has a very fine figure for a girl of her age, Rochefort, and of course she is very pretty, there is no doubt about that—you had better get her mother to take her up to London for a week or two about her dresses, and she must have a good riding-habit Can her mother be trusted about her dresses, do you think? It is very important.”

“I don’t know, mamma. Can you give her any hints about them.”

“No, *thank you*, Rochefort; I would *rather* be excused! But I’ll tell you what she ought to have, if you like. I was thinking about it nearly all the way coming home. Can you give me a pencil and a piece of paper?” Rochefort found some paper, and then opened his gold pencil-case, and gave it into his mother’s hands.

Mrs. Longley wrote for some time. “Of

course," she said at last, throwing herself back on her sofa, and giving the paper to her son, "I know *they* won't be able to afford all that; but you must see that it's done somehow; it won't do for you to be buying her everything she puts on directly after she is married."

It will be seen from the above speeches that by this time Mrs. Longley had become hopelessly resigned to the impending calamity, and was taking it with as good a grace as she could. "It was no use doing anything else now," she had written to her sister; "Rochefort was infatuated, and if he was to suffer for his folly, *must* suffer. She was very sorry, but she had done her best, and now washed her hands of the concern—or rather of its consequences."

She "washed" them, however, by secretly taking a considerable interest in all the preparations that were going forward, and in giving her advice and opinion on every possible occasion. "As the thing *was* to be done, it might as well be done well," she said to herself, and to Alison; and Alison quite concurred.

On the last day of August, in the evening, the master walked over half his farm with Gray, and gave him many directions as to what he wished done during the three coming months of autumn, and of absence. When they came near the bailiff's house the two parted, and Mr. Longley struck off down a road leading to the domain of one of his poor tenants ; the said tenant having been laid up from the results of an accident for the past four weeks, and being thereby in rather low water, and very low spirits. Rochefort paid his call, and then sauntered slowly home by a different road to the one he had come, through deep-cut, green lanes, with the shade of oak and ash trees dark above his head, and the tall hedge-rows redolent with their night odours of moss, and fern, and meadow-sweet. As he walked along, he fancied he saw smoke rising at a little distance, and after going a few steps further, became aware of a couple of donkeys with their legs tied together which were grazing on the road-side ; then of a small cart with a cover to it ; and then of a bright fire, fed,

in all probability, with stakes and staves from his own hedges. Something was roasting at this fire ; but what, the master did not exactly see ; for as soon as his approach was observed, it was hurriedly removed and hidden away in the tent behind. The woman who had been superintending the cooking of the supper a moment before now sat with suddenly assumed listlessness before the fire, her elbows on her knees, her face held in her two hands, and her eyes straightly directed towards the master as he came up to them. A man was standing near her, and several children—brown as Indians, and each possessing apparently but one vestment, and that one of very scanty proportions—tumbled about on the grass. A young fellow of eighteen or nineteen lay stretched on his back before one of the tents, and smoked a short clay pipe ; and there was a litter of tin pans, skewers, and clothes' pegs about, at which he had evidently been working. A young woman, about his own age completed the company. The elder gipsy woman, who had a striking and rather

handsome face, looked at Rochefort so steadily and fixedly as he approached, that though he had intended to pass without taking any notice of her, he stopped a moment, struck by something peculiar in her expression, and said, carelessly,

“Well, my good woman, have you anything to say to me?”

She paused fully two minutes, before answering him, and during those two minutes never moved her eyes from his face.

“I may have,” she returned at last, “if you have a mind to listen.”

“That means, I suppose, if I have any silver about me to cross your hand with?”

The young man with the pipe looked at him and nodded, saying, “Aye, aye, sir.”

“You have plenty of silver about you,” said the gipsy woman, “and always have had plenty, and always will have. It’s not *that* you’ll ever want.”

“That is easy for you to say. You know me.”

“I have never seen your face before.”

“Well, you have looked at it enough for

once," he returned, laughing. "You will know it again, I think. However, it is not fair for me to stand and have my fortune told for nothing, so here you are ; and now when is it to be—this year, next year, some time, or never ? And is she fair or dark, tall or short ; tell us all about it ?"

He put some silver into her hand, and threw himself on the grass at her side, turning his dark, handsome eyes upon her, with an expression half of admiration, half of carelessness.

"You are a great deal too young, and too good-looking to tell fortunes," he said ; uttering this speech, merely because he had nothing better to say, and at the moment didn't care what he said.

Her husband laughed, looked sheepish, and walked away to light his pipe.

"You are thinking to get better luck given you for your money, by flattery," said the gipsy-woman, "but I am too old for flattery. Keep your pretty speeches for the *one as cares for them*." She spoke these last words with a rather peculiar

emphasis ; and looked at the young man with a furtive but very keen glance, as she said them.

“ I am only wasting my time here,” pursued Rochefort, carelessly ; “ you know all about me—and I know that you do ; any-one you met within ten miles could tell you whatever you wished to know. *I* don’t want my fortune told.” He raised himself as if to go.

“ You don’t want your fortune told, eh ?” repeated the gipsy, “ then what’ll you give me to let you off without telling it ?”

He should have gone then : should have walked home heart-whole, unhaunted, and laughing at the whole thing.

Instead of this, he looked intently at her for a moment—forced a laugh—then suddenly held out his hand, and said,

“ Tell me what you like—I defy you to know anything that I don’t know myself—you cannot harm me.”

The woman struck a match, held it to a candle, and brought the light to bear on the multitudinous lines in the firm, white

hand, which she held within her own. She studied it for some time ; Rochefort, the while, studying her strange face, and trying to read its meaning—as she was trying to read his fate.

“ There are two lines here,” she said at last, slowly, “ which run side by side for a little while : they meet—then they divide again. At last—yes, I think I see—that at last, they meet again—but only for a time.”

She paused, and Rochefort did not say a word.

“ Here are other lines,” she went on, “ which tell of suffering and sorrow—in foreign lands : and here—what do I see *here* ?” She raised her eyes, and looked fixedly into her listener’s face. Rochefort returned her look for an instant ; then suddenly threw away her hand ; rose, and said abruptly,—

“ There, you need not tell me any more. But you shouldn’t have treated me so badly,” he added, attempting a laugh ; “ I suppose I ought to have given you gold instead of silver.”

“ You can give me gold now if you like,” returned the gipsy woman, with rather a peculiar smile. “ You can give me gold for not telling you more.”

“ Thanks ; the gold shall be for the next time, when you are in rather a better humour. I suppose I put you out, by making you put off your supper ? Now, I hope you will enjoy it. Here, children,” and he threw them a handful of coppers, after which they ran like a herd of young hungry pigs. The master watched them for a minute, and then, with a slight nod to their handsome, dark, mother, who was looking at him just as before, with her face resting on her hands, went his way—but not home. When he came to the churchyard, which was not ten minutes walk from the hall, he opened a small wicket-gate, struck along a narrow foot-way which divided the grassy, grave-besprinkled enclosure, opened another gate, and walked up a path bordered with rhododendrons and laurestinus, to the rectory door. It was open, and Mrs. Rutherford was just

crossing the passage with a great print apron over her dress, a pair of leather gloves on her hands, and laden with a trowel and a watering-pot.

“Oh, Mr. Longley, is that you? Well, I am a disgraceful figure, but never mind; the rector ’ll be very pleased to see you. Mr. Rutherford—Mr. Rutherford!—Sarah Jane, bring a lamp into this hall directly. One can’t see an inch before one’s nose.”

“Is Mr. Rutherford in?” asked Rochefort, as he entered.

“Oh, yes, he’s in;—or only just gone out—which is the same thing. Here—Elizabeth!—just run over to Old Jeremy’s, and tell your master Mr. Longley is here.”

“Oh, don’t worry him,” said Rochefort; “I dare say he’ll be in in a few minutes.”

“Well, come into the dining-room at all events,” pursued the rector’s worthy spouse, as she pulled off her thick gloves.

“Sarah Jane! bring some candles in here, directly. Why, you’ll think we live in total darkness, Mr. Rochefort.”

“It’s much cooler without lights this

weather," returned that young gentleman.

"What's the matter with Old Jeremy?"

"Oh, in trouble, that's all," returned the practical Mrs. Rutherford; "his married daughter's just dead. Confined only a week ago, and she and the baby both gone."

"Who was his daughter?"

"I don't suppose you know her. They hav'n't lived very long in this parish. She married a poor, silly sort of fellow, who by-the-bye, worked for you in the last hay harvest, but your bailiff turned him off—he was so slow and sleepy."

"Did he? What have the family lived on?"

"Oh, partly on what she got by washing; partly by what little he did; partly on charity. I've been sending her things all this week."

"Has she suffered from her husband being out of employment? You should have told me—as you say—Gray turned him off our place."

"Your bailiff isn't over soft with the

people, Rochefort ; but I don't blame him for that. Francis says the place has never been farmed as it is now—between you two. However, we were talking of poor Tom Jones's wife. The worst of it is, there are five children left ; and it's my belief the poor thing has been starving and stinting herself for them—and working hard at the same time, and that when her trouble came, she hadn't strength for it. That's the plain truth, I imagine."

Mrs. Rutherford worked off this speech on the spur of the moment ; and as the phrase is, "meant nothing whatever by it."

But Rochefort, in the space of one instant, saw himself in the light of a selfish brute. He thought of nothing but that he had had money tumbling about in his pockets, while this poor mother of five children was "working and stinting herself to death." That was the way he put it to himself. There were charities—and well dispensed charities, enough — in the parish, more than in many parishes ; and some of them recently organized between himself and the

rector; but as Mrs. Rutherford delivered herself of that unlucky little speech (it was probably more than half true), Rochefort mentally took every one of those charities up into his strong hands and pitched them into the next ditch because not one of them had so disposed of itself as to save a poor mother's life in time of need.

"Why on earth didn't you let me know?" he asked, as he sat before the good lady on the sofa. "I might have done something. Especially as you say the man was so incapable—it was one's duty. Good God! Mrs. Rutherford, is one to sit at home with one man to black one's boots, and another to hand one's plate, and a third to uncork wine one never drinks; and is one to know nothing of a poor woman who is dying for want of a little help?"

Mrs. Rutherford had never seen him so painfully distressed in her life.

"Why, bless you, Rochefort," she said, clearing her throat a little, "are you going to take in hand all the illnesses of the parish? You will have enough to do, I can

tell you. And, besides, this is quite a rare instance. These women are made of entirely different stuff to those in the rank *your* wife is coming from, for instance. Bless you, they get through these affairs like a house on fire, with no nursing at all ; and only tea and bread and butter to feed themselves and the baby on." She had been hard put to it for something to say to redeem her unlucky hit.

"But it seems they *don't* always get through them," persisted Mr. Longley.

"Well, there may be individual cases now and then when they don't, of course ; but as a rule they do, and are much stronger than your fine ladies, who have such a lot of waiting upon."

"And what is to be done about these five poor children ? Who will take care of them ?"

"Heaven and their father and the eldest girl, who is twelve years of age. The woman next door will look in on them now and then. Oh, the man will marry again before long."

Rochefort was silent for a few moments ; then he said,—it being the only idea that occurred to him—

“Can’t you get a woman from somewhere to go and look after them ? You can pay her what is right, you know, and then tell me what it is. For the Lord’s sake don’t be afraid of asking me for money when you want it. These sort of cases don’t come under any especial system.”

“You are very kind,” said Mrs. Rutherford ; “but, my dear boy, how can I send a woman into that little cottage, with only two rooms, and the father coming home every night ?” There was a short pause.

“I don’t see, however, how a child of twelve years old is to take care of five young ones and herself too, do you ?” asked Rochefort, at length.

“They don’t live as we do, Rochefort.”

“But they live somehow, I suppose ?”

“Somehow, yes. But come, don’t go making yourself miserable about what can’t be helped, we’ll do what can be done. Perhaps they’ll all come up and live with old

Jeremy after all—and he'll take care of them. Stay and have some supper with us. I've a lovely raspberry tart, and some delicious cream. And there's sweet-breads if you like them. Mr. Rutherford has them oftener than anything else. Or there's some lovely pressed beef!"

"I can't stay, thanks. You see I've only a few more evenings with my mother. Mrs. Rutherford—will you *promise* always to let me know in future when there is any especial case of sickness and distress in the village, that I may do what I can? Why on earth shouldn't my money be of some use?"

"I'll tell you fast enough, Mr. Longley, when there'll be no mischief in giving. As a rule, you know, there is mischief, unfortunately. What's done *once* they expect again; what's done for Ann and Adam must be done for Betsy and Thomas; otherwise there's envy and jealousy, and I don't know what. You don't know half the bother there is among 'em all, sometimes. When I first married, I was no

end tender-hearted, but I'm regularly out-and-out hardened now. It's these public-houses, and this beer-drinking that's at the bottom of nearly everything. If you give the women money and help, ten to one but their husbands only spend a greater share out of their wages in tippling."

The rector came in at this juncture.

"I have been getting scolded," commenced his wife, "because I don't ask for money often enough."

"You give away a great deal of money, Rochefort," said Mr. Rutherford, seating himself in his particular leather chair, which stood, winter and summer, by the side of the fireplace, and crossing his legs comfortably; "what do you want to do more?"

"Only to reach the real distress of the people, if I could. It seems that, in spite of all one does, there are cases in which one has done nothing."

"Of course there are, my dear fellow. There are everywhere;—only in the country one counts them by twos and threes, in the towns by thousands. You can only cope

with the evil to a certain extent ; because unhappily, the more you give, *beyond a certain point*, the more you encourage idleness."

The young owner of ten thousand a-year, who had never known, and never would know want, as long as he lived — to whom want seemed a terrible thing, and one with which it was his bounden duty to grapple as far as in him lay—sat with his elbow resting on his knee, his head sunk in one hand, while with the other he played in an absent way with Mrs. Rutherford's little pet spaniel, who fawned and pawed upon his knee. Mrs. Rutherford had taken off her apron and bonnet, and got her knitting—for she always knitted when she had nothing else to do—and Mr. Rutherford had quietly lighted his pipe, being almost incapable of sitting still anywhere, except in the pulpit (and it was sometimes hard work to do it there), without smoking.

No one spoke for several minutes ; then Mrs. Rutherford said, looking towards the dog—

“Have you been accustomed to wear that ring, Rochefort? I haven’t noticed it before.”

“My father gave it me when I came of age. No—I have been wearing a mourning ring, till just now.”

“And you oughtn’t to wear that one, on a lonely road on a moonlight night,” said Mr. Rutherford, laughing; “some hungry man might take a fancy to it.”

“I sometimes think,” said Rochefort, after a pause, “that I could be capable of almost anything, if I saw my wife and children without food. It must be horrible—beyond expression, horrible.” And he almost shuddered.

“God bless me!” exclaimed Mrs. Rutherford, dropping her knitting, and looking at him over her spectacles; “I hope you don’t mean to say that you could murder a man for the sake of a diamond ring?”

Rochefort at first laughed, and did not reply to her question; but after a time he went on—

“How do we know how much of the

awful crime and brutality in the world arises first from miserable, biting poverty—actual want of food and home?”

“It is often a very remote ‘first,’ Longley,” answered the parson, between the puffs of his pipe; “the most awful robberies are not committed by starving men, but by rascals who are full enough of both meat and drink—especially the latter.”

“Yes, when they commit the robberies, or the murders; but how about the beginnings?—the pocket-picking, shop-lifting, and striking of each other down for an apple, or a crust of bread, or a halfpenny? The mischief begins when they are poor, hungry little wretches of four or five years old.”

“God knows you are right,” said the clergyman.

Rochefort, who had been taking a turn or two in the room, stopped before him suddenly, and asked,

“Well, and what is one to do? There must be the key to the mending of all this misery somewhere. Where is it? All our

organized charity has not given it us yet."

"The key'll never be found in this world to the mending of all of it, my boy, nor of half of it. You may be satisfied of that."

"How pitiably small and poor our *best* is, in every way," said Longley, as he walked up and down the dining-room floor.

"Yes," said the clergyman; "but there's one comfort, when every other fails (that is if one can look back on a life in which one has tried to do *something*, there is no comfort otherwise!) which is, that this is God's world, and not ours. We shall not be held responsible for its weight of sin; only for our used or misused chances of clothing when we *could* clothe, feeding when we *could* feed, visiting those sick and in trouble when the way was opened to us."

"Which we have not been doing," thought Rochefort; but he did not speak.

"And now, look here, Mr. Longley," put in Mrs. Rutherford at this juncture, "I think we've all had serious talk enough for one while, and at this time of night, too.

Now, your mother doesn't go to bed till nearly eleven ; you can stay and have a bit of supper with us," and she put down her knitting and took off her spectacles. "I'll go and see about having it in at once."

"I can't, indeed ; thank you. I've stayed too long as it is," and he rose and held out his hand to her.

"I'll see you out into the road," said the rector, rising from his chair. "Have supper in, Sarah, I sha'n't be five minutes."

As they walked down the gravel path together, Rochefort said, with a sort of effort,

"Do you know, Rutherford, I have been having my fortune told this evening ?"

"Your fortune told—who by ?"

"A handsome gipsy woman, with the strangest eyes I ever saw. She prophesied me a lot of sorrow and separations, and I don't know what."

"Well, and you're not such a ——, you don't mean to say you paid the least attention to what she prophesied?" inquired Mr. Rutherford, looking at him.

“Yes, I did. I thought of what she said, and of nothing else till I came here.”

“What’s the matter with you? You’ve been living too low, or going without your meals, or not sleeping at night?”

“No, nothing of the sort. But I think it possible that all the opposition I have had about my marriage has affected me thus far, that I have a sort of superstition about it at times.”

“Pooh!” said Mr. Rutherford; and for a few moments he said no more.

When they reached the wicket-gate at the boundary of the garden, the rector said, however, after standing a minute or two,

“Come back with me, Rochefort; I want to read you something.”

“Come back with you?” repeated the other, surprised.

“Yes, as far as my study. I won’t keep you three minutes. Do as I ask you, Rochefort; you’ve never crossed me yet since you were born.”

The two walked back together, Mr. Rutherford talking on indifferent topics till

they reached the house. His study was on the left hand-side of the entrance, and had two doors to it, one covered with red cloth. They entered and found a reading-lamp burning low upon the table. The clergyman put up the light to its fullest, seated himself in his black horse-hair throne in front of it, pulled a great book before him, put on his spectacles, and after turning over the pages a little, said,

“ Now, my lad, listen to this. You learnt every word of it when you were a boy, and I’ll be bound you’ve forgotten every word of it since.”

Mr. Rutherford read :—

“ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress : my God ; in Him will I trust.

“ Surely He will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

“ He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust : his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

“Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

“Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day.

“A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. * * *

“Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation;

“He shall give his angels charge over thee in all thy ways. * * *

“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.” * *

Mr. Rutherford rose, took off his spectacles, wiped them, and then his eyes, and looked across to where Rochefort was standing against the wall in shadow, and with his face bent towards the ground.

“Thank you, Mr. Rutherford. You have been very good to me.”

“Do you remember it?”

“Only a verse or two here and there.
What Psalm is it?”

“The ninety-first. Now, be off with
you, and God bless you.”

They wrung hands and parted.

CHAPTER XII.

“ERNEST, you don’t deserve kissing, and I don’t think I shall kiss you; for you’ve never written me a line since you went. What have you been doing with yourself—where have you been?”

“I’ve not been out of Aberdeenshire—I’ve been safe enough, Miss Augusta. There, give me a kiss; it’s a relief to have one, after three weeks on the moors with Scotch guides and in pouring rain. You talk about not writing,” he added, as he walked across the hall towards his brother’s room, with his little sister hanging on his arm, “but I wrote before I went, and I wrote last week. What do you want more?”

“You call that writing!—the ridiculous little scraps you sent Sidney? We might as well have heard nothing. However, never mind. Come and see Sid; papa’s out at a shooting dinner, and mamma had such a bad headache she has gone to bed; so we shall be all to ourselves.”

Sidney Glanville was lying on his back on a sofa, with a litter of books and papers about him, and his hands loosely clasped over his head. His face was very pale, and in feature rather like his brother’s, but in expression totally different. His figure was short and slight. He did not move as his brother entered, but held out his hand and said,

“Back again, old boy?”

“Back again,” answered Ernest, seating himself near the sofa, leaning his arms on his knees, and looking kindly into his brother’s face; “and how are you? About as usual?”

“Just as usual, thank you. But I am in a predicament just at present. Lindsay has sprained his knee, and is ordered to lay

up for a fortnight, and Henry has to ‘nurse me,’” said poor Sidney, attempting a laugh, “and doesn’t seem to like it. You see, there’s Lindsay to be attended to as well; and nursing isn’t his forte. He’ll give notice, I know, if Lindsay isn’t about again to time.”

“What nonsense!—and as if you need bother yourself if he does! Is Lindsay’s a bad sprain?”

“I don’t know exactly what it is. He made nothing of it at first, but now it’s swelled and has had to be blistered.”

“Well, you must let me do whatever I can for you. Don’t worry yourself. Lindsay will be all right in a week or two.”

“Things are always nicer when Ernest’s at home,” said Augusta, seating herself by his side, and casting her arms over his neck. She was a dark, bright-looking girl of about eighteen, well dressed, and with handsome ornaments shining on her rounded neck and arms—together a very pleasant sight for the eyes of both brothers to rest upon. “And have you had good shooting?” she asked.

“Pretty good. We bagged forty brace yesterday, and six hares. I’ve brought some up with me. The rain has been the nuisance, but we had a few fine days enough.”

“You never told us anything about the wedding,” pursued his sister; “did it go off well?”

“The wedding?—oh, ah, I see. Yes, it went off all right; better than I expected under the circumstances.”

“Did the bride look pretty?”

“She always looks pretty—couldn’t do anything else,” returned Ernest.

“Well, but how was she dressed, and what bridesmaids were there—and how were they dressed?—tell us all about it,” continued Augusta, in one breath.

“There were six bridesmaids—and they were dressed in white muslin, with blue trimmings, and blue silk boots, and bouquets—and they looked very well. There—I remembered that on purpose to tell you,” said her brother. “The two little ones, in their short skirts, looked like cherubs.”

“ Well—the bride ? ”

“ Oh, she had white satin, I believe, and a veil, and orange blossoms—the regulation thing.”

(“ White satin isn’t ‘ regulation ’ yet,” interrupted his sister, in a low voice.)

“ Well, it *was* white satin in this instance, I’m sure of that.”

“ I should like to be married in a cathedral,” said Augusta, after a moment’s silence ; “ it must look very grand ! ”

“ Yes, it looked rather grand ; and there was a lot of organ music, of course. It gave me more the feeling of being at an officer’s funeral, than at a wedding.”

“ Ernest, what a horrible idea ! ”

“ Who was there ? ” asked Mr. Glanville.

“ In the cathedral do you mean, or at the breakfast ? There was the world at the service, of course ; at the breakfast there were several friends of Longley’s, and a few of the Heatons. They managed very well. The men and the flowers came down from Riverswood, for the occasion, and I suppose the plate and the china from the

old uncle's at Gowerford. Mrs. Heaton looked rather red and nervous all the time, and made spasmodic remarks that were meant to be easy, but she sat it out well. The old uncle and Arthur's aunt, Lady Hallingford, and a Colonel Saville—he's the county member, and a great friend of Longley's—and of course Longley himself—were the only people who looked comfortable, and talked as if they were at home."

"Was Lady Hallingford there?" inquired Augusta.

"Yes, and I should think Mrs. Heaton will worship her very memory for evermore. She made all the laughing there was, and was friends and at ease with every one. She left her title behind her on the doorstep; and 'did' the old aunt of the bridegroom in the prettiest way imaginable, and in grey silk and black lace that became her perfectly. I forget if you know her, Gussy?"

"I've only seen her at a distance."

"Oh, well, you'll know her, and many worse people next spring, if you live. She's a

very little woman, and has very bright, kind, black eyes. Poor Mrs. Heaton would have had an awkward time without her, for the queen-mother behaved very badly, talking to no one but Mrs. Saville, or her sister-in-law: and the Heaton set, except a cousin who had been to Eton, looked flushed and awkward. I can't think how such a pearl as—such a lovely little woman as Mrs. Rochefort, has grown up among them. There is a little sister just like her, a veritable white rose-bud among peonies.”

“Was Lord Hallingford nice?” inquired Augusta; “and what is he like? tell me.”

“So that you may know whether or not to fall in love with him? He's rather a scamp, Augusta; in fact, he's a very bad scamp. Arthur and he had a quarrel once at Hallingford Castle, years ago, and there has been no love lost between them since. He only showed up to make things look square and proper, and to accompany his mother. He's the only cousin, you know.”

“Does he look disagreeable?” asked Miss Glanville.

“Disagreeable? oh, not at all. He’s short and stout, and has rather a handsome nice face; good features, you know, and a pleasant voice. Most of your real out-and-out scamps are very refined, good-looking, fellows, with ever such mellow voices, and the most gentlemanly manners on earth—in society.”

“Do you mean really, Ernest?” inquired his little sister, looking up at him in bewilderment.

“Oh, yes, my darling; and now I’ve put you well on your guard against wolves in sheep’s clothing, haven’t I? I’d no idea I was going to do anything so praiseworthy. Ah—here’s tea, that’s right; or supper—or something; now, Syd, can I give you anything?”

“I suppose you’ve dined?” said Augusta, “if you hav’n’t——”

“I have, thanks. Dined at York on my way up. Will you have something, Sidney?”

“I’m on the bread-and-milk and ‘light pudding’ regimen, just at present,” returned Mr. Glanville, with some weariness in his

tone ; “and I have partridges every other day for dinner, so I couldn’t stand them at supper too.”

“Which just reminds me,” continued Ernest, “that I’ll have some cold beef instead of this bird. I’m tired of game. Hav’n’t you been sleeping well?” he inquired, when, after having rung the bell, he turned sideways on his chair, and leaned his elbow on the back ; “you want me at home to make you get out more.”

“Nonsense ; you’ll want to shoot, and I don’t want to keep you tied to me. Parker can drive me.”

“Parker be hanged,” returned the younger brother, suddenly ; “I believe it’s because you’re afraid of Parker’s driving, that you don’t go out oftener when I’m away. It’s my belief the fellow’s short-sighted, and doesn’t see the stones, or the ruts. Will you be ready by four o’clock to-morrow ? That won’t keep me out of much shooting.”

After Mr. Glanville had assented, and a little further talk relative to “the moors”

had been gone through, Augusta, who was leaning her arms on the table, and watching her brother eat, suddenly asked, "Where have they gone for their wedding tour? You didn't tell us."

"They—who are they? Why, the girl's mad about weddings; and can't hear enough. Abroad—the Rhine, Italy; and then Algiers, I believe—or Constantinople, or whatever she cares about. She has never been further than Stafford yet, to visit some aunts." After a further pause—

"I must say," continued Mr. Ernest, cutting some bread for himself, "that life did not look unattractive, presented in the form of a beautiful little girl of one-and-twenty, in a distracting grey silk costume, with a veritable 'perfume of Paradise' about it, and her gloves, and her hair—who came to kiss everybody, before going off into the unknown world, in her lover's brougham." Ernest swallowed his bit of bread, drunk off his wine, and went to stand with his back against the mantle-piece.

"Was that how she was dressed—in

grey silk?" inquired Miss Augusta, with unabated interest.

Both the brothers burst into almost a roar of laughter.

"Did I tell you how she was dressed? I didn't know I did," said Ernest. "I was thinking of something else. Well, Longley's wildly in love," he added, as he struck a light for his cigar; "so I dare say they'll be very happy for six months."

"Only for six months, Ernest?" repeated Mr. Glanville, half turning his eyes round to where his brother was standing.

"Well, that's my guess. I may be right, or I may be wrong," returned Ernest carelessly. "Can you stand a cigar to-night, Sydney? You can? That's right, and now let us hear how you've got up the accompaniment to 'I arise from dreams of thee,' Gussy. Have you been practising it?"

END OF VOL. I.

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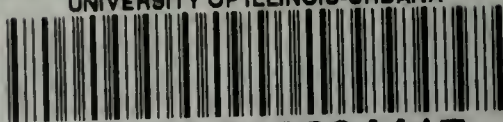
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